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ADMIRABLE LIFE

OF THE GLORIOUS

PATRIARCH SAINT JOSEPH

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF THE ABBÉ J. A. BOULLAN, DOCTOR IN THEOLOGY.

PERMISSU SUPERIORUM.

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APPROBATIONS.

THE volume which we now offer to the public, under the title of "*The Admirable Life of the Glorious Patriarch St. Joseph*," is a faithful extract, without change, modification, or alteration, taken *verbatim et literatim* from the celebrated production, "*The Cité Mystique*,"* of Mary of Jesus of Agreda. Hence, all the approbations conferred on the latter work are applicable to this. We subjoin a sketch of these various approbations, of which we guarantee the authenticity, having copied them from the acts of the process for the beatification and canonization of the servant of God, Maria d'Agreda.

1. Approbation of the bishop of the place where this servant of God died in the odor of sanctity, and also of that where the work was published. Bishops, (as every one knows) are the judges, in the first instance, of the doctrine of the books which are published in places under their jurisdiction.

2. Approbation of the inquisition of Spain, who examined it, word for word, and authorized its publication and diffusion.

3. Approbation of all the religious bodies appointed to examine this work. They have bestowed unbounded praises upon it, and recommend it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit of God.

* The Mystical City of God.

4. Approbation of the most celebrated universities, who, after a minute examination, have declared that this book contains nothing contrary to faith or morals, and who have exalted it beyond measure, as the Sovereign Pontiff, Benedict XIV., attests in his decree of 1748. The university of Paris alone offers an exception, because, at that epoch, it was controlled by the influences of Jansenism.

5. Finally, the Roman Church, after having placed this work on the Index, August 4th, 1681, on account of the controversy which it excited, withdrew it on the 9th of November of the same year. This last decree is of such force, that in 1713, a bishop having prohibited the reading of it, the Holy Office declared this prohibition to be of no effect, and obliged the bishop to retract it, as being contrary to the decree of the 9th of November, 1681, of Innocent XI., which decree, said the Holy Congregation, has the force of an obligatory law throughout the Universal Church. *Qui habit aures, audiendi, audiat.*

Alexander VIII. authorized the reading of it *oraculo vivæ vocis.* Clement IX., in 1704, prohibited its being placed on the Index. And last of all, in 1729, under Pope Benedict XIII., of holy memory, the Sacred Congregation of Rites promulgated an ample and unanimous decree, which *allows this book to be read and retained without any further examination.* Hence, he who, by whatever rank, dignity, or honor he may be invested, presumes to forbid the reading of this work, which has been approved by the Holy See, will be obliged, if required, to make a public retractation.

Thus, pious reader, the cause is ended. Read the book, and study it without hesitation; for Rome, who cannot err has spoken.

THE ABBÉ J. A. BOULLAN.

TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS, AND TO MARY IMMACULATE.

Oh, Jesus! Son of the Eternal Father! Divine Redeemer of our souls, whom Thou hast redeemed by the effusion of Thy precious blood! Thou hast deigned, during Thy mortal life, to call by the sweet name of father, the glorious St. Joseph, and Thou hast chosen to be named by men the son of Joseph. Word of God! Master of eternal wisdom! to whom, unless it be to Thy Sacred Heart, can I more worthily make the offering of this little book, in honor of the incomparable Patriarch? Deign, I implore Thee, to bless it, and its author. All unworthy and miserable as I am, I beseech Thee that this life of Thine adopted father may bear fruits of grace to many souls—that it may become a blessing to the dwellings which receive it—that the sinner may be converted, and the just encouraged to become holy, by meditating upon it. Oh, Sacred Heart of Jesus! vouchsafe to grant that grace, and these favors, in memory of Thy complaisance

in the fidelity and love of Thy glorious servant, Saint Joseph!

Mother of Jesus! Immaculate Virgin! Spouse of St. Joseph, thou who hast deigned to communicate to us by means of thy beloved daughter, Mary of Agreda, all that forms the subject of this volume, disdain not, Queen of Mercy, to bless it. I place it in thy hands. Thou knowest, that, overwhelmed by the weight of my miseries, I have had recourse to thy glorious spouse, whom thou hast permitted me to call my father; and that in acknowledgment of his miraculous benefits I have applied myself, by thy consent, to this work. May this *Life* serve as an instrument to augment the devotion to St. Joseph among the children of the Church. Thou hast warned us, O Mother of Pity, that *the damned will weep bitterly for not having known this means, so powerful and so efficacious, for their salvation, and for not having availed themselves of it.* (*Book V., ch. XVI*). May those who yet live on earth, know and profit by it, to forsake the ways of sin, and to recover the grace of the just.

Worthy father of the Queen of Heaven, St. Joachim, you whom the blessed Mother, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, have given me for my patron in the new vocation to which I have been so freely predestined and called, deign to present the humble offering of my book to the great Patriarch St. Joseph, and obtain for me, by your efficacious intercession, that I may be worthy to persevere to the end in the way which his mediation with Jesus and Mary has opened for me.

Jesus! Mary! Joseph! all hail!

THE ABBE J. A. BOULLAN.

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INTRODUCTION.

WHO, among the faithful, feels not a holy desire to know the *admirable life* of the glorious Patriarch whom the divine Providence gave to be the spouse of the august Queen of Heaven, and whom the Son of God called Father? It seems to us that the souls consecrated to God, who all have St. Joseph for their patron and protector, will rejoice to read the life of him towards whom they have so particular a devotion. Has not the seraphic St. Teresa made known to the world that St. Joseph is so powerful and so merciful that "*he helps us in all things!*" What a heartfelt joy it is to instruct ourselves in all that constitutes the glory and the grandeur of our incomparable Patriarch!

God, in the wise designs of His Providence, chose to conceal much of what related to this saint, "who has no equal, and will never be equal-

led," from the primitive Church, because it was of the first necessity to establish the law of grace, and to publish the Gospel. Doubtless, these were not incompatible; but the human mind, ignorant as it was, might have been in some degree disturbed at that time, when the faith in the incarnation was still feeble, and the precepts of the New Law were yet, so to speak, in their infancy. But at length the happy times have come when God is pleased to manifest the grandeur of the glorious spouse of Mary, and the reputed father of our Lord. (Cité Mystique, vol. viii. p. 277.)

The devotion to the glorious St. Joseph had its birth, like that of the Sacred Heart, in France. It went forth, at least to the West, from the bosom of Provence, originating in a confraternity at Avignon. The land which the contemplative Magdalen, Martha, and her school of virgins, had consecrated, and where Lazarus had borne a mitre in place of the winding-sheet, witnessed the first honors paid to our saint.

From thence the devotion to St. Joseph was afterwards extended to the universal Church. Gerson was the theologian of this devotion; St. Teresa was its saint; and St. Francis de Sales spread it among the people. The religious bodies of the Carmelites and Jesuits welcomed it with holy joy. Contemplative souls found in

it their nourishment; the laboring classes became attached to it; young people and old adopted it. St. Sulpice, in accepting it, introduced it among the secular clergy. Thus the beautiful devotion to St. Joseph attracted in these latter ages innumerable religious orders and congregations, — great and small, young and old, ecclesiastics and laics, schools and confraternities, hospitals, asylums, and houses of penitence. At this time it is universal: it extends over the whole of Europe and America, and it prevails in the most remote regions where our intrepid missionaries disseminate and make it dear to millions of savages. (Le S. Sacrament, vol. i. p. 218.)

We forewarn the reader that the *admirable life of the glorious Patriarch*, St. Joseph, which he is about to read, is marvellous in the details that form its ground-work, and in the manner by which it was given to the world. Let it be understood that it is not a product of science, nor of the human mind, but entirely of the gift of infused science. The venerable Maria de Jesus d'Agreda wrote, under the dictation of the Mother of God, the history of the Queen of Heaven; and in this book, *the most extraordinary, and the most astonishing that ever came from the hand of a human being*, as it has been justly

termed by the Rev. P. Laurent, in the *introduction* to the life of this servant of God, there were many things appertaining to the glorious St. Joseph. Influenced by the advice of men whose counsels we regard as commands, we have extracted, neither altering nor modifying any thing, all that is contained in the CITÉ MYSTIQUE regarding St. Joseph, and have formed from it the volume which we now publish, adding nothing to the text of the servant of God, that the book may not be deprived of the approbations with which it is invested, nor of the grace that was attached to the words written under the dictation of the august Mary.

To this admirable life we have subjoined, in an Appendix, the life of the venerable Maria of Jesus d'Agreda, from her biography, written by a learned and pious cotemporary, the Franciscan father, Samaniego; and we ourselves have rendered this biography complete by adding thereto details which we are persuaded our readers will peruse with interest, because they contain the approbations which the *Cité Mystique* has received from the supreme authority of the holy Apostolic See. They will also find there fruits of grace and salvation which this book is destined to produce in the souls who seek to edify themselves by its perusal. The *Life* is

preceded by an introduction extracted from the manuscripts of M. Olier, of holy memory.

These pages, inspired by the gift of divine illumination, contain, in one view, all that has been published of the most sublime and profound upon the incomparable St. Joseph. We offer them for the meditation of contemplative minds and pious Christians, and especially for the priesthood, who will rejoice to be made acquainted with them. We think that the gift of infused science has never reached a higher degree of elevation, nor produced pages more worthy of veneration.

It might be thought incumbent upon us now to present a treatise on the gift of infused science, to serve as a ground-work for this volume; but the reader will permit us to refer him to the lives of all our saints. All the theologians, without exception, admit these supernatural gifts; and the Church, which cannot err, in the canonization of saints, recognizes special revelations, without, however, even in her approbation, giving them the value or authority of divine faith. The Church, in approving, permits, but does not oblige them to be believed. That which is of obligation is, that those who believe in them from motives which claim their adherence, are not to be troubled on this account.

To avoid repetitions, we refer such as may desire more detailed information to the last pages of this volume.

It would, doubtless, be easy to prove the complete accord of all that will be found most extraordinary and marvellous in *the admirable life of the glorious Patriarch, St. Joseph*, with the conclusions and instructions of theologians. Thus, the servant of God declares that Joseph was sanctified in the bosom of his mother, and Suarez (in whose writings are comprised those of all the doctors, since, according to Collet, he has read all and includes all), teaches that he was sanctified before his birth. Maria of Jesus declares that St. Joseph is in heaven in body and soul. Suarez makes the same assertion—and the same may be said of all the others; yet in this work only there are to be found such precise and admirable details as will be sought for in vain elsewhere.

But is it really established that the Blessed Virgin herself dictated the "*Cité Mystique*," from which our volume is an extract, to the venerable Maria of Jesus d'Agreda? The proofs of this fact are numerous, and we request the reader to turn to the life of the servant of God, where he may convince himself of this truth, which we cannot undertake to establish in this place.

We do not pretend to deny that this book will encounter obstinate and ardent adversaries to discredit it; but it will also find, as we trust, friends who will zealously promote its propagation. Hell will neglect nothing to injure the work, and we already know that this enemy will find coadjutors even among good people nevertheless, reason, truth, and right will triumph in spite of the rage of the demon, and all the obstacles that he can bring to bear against it. Two years since we published an abridgment of the *Cité Mystique*, under the title of *The Divine Life of the Most Holy Virgin Mary.* It is impossible to recount the trouble which this work has cost us, nor the difficulties interposed by the demon to prevent its propagation; nevertheless, we have had the consolation to find that six thousand copies have been disposed of within a short time. If others will aid us, many more will yet be spread abroad of that as well as of *this admirable life of St. Joseph.* We are able here to affirm that we have been filled with graces and benedictions in consequence of the publication of *the Divine Life of the Most Holy Virgin*, and we are far from complaining of all that we have had to suffer in regard to it. We pray the reader to pardon the introduction of these particulars.

Shall we venture to open our mind fully? Why should we detain the truth captive, when the good of souls demands that we fear not to publish it? But to give more weight to our words, we will invoke a great authority, and cite on this subject a passage which is a veritable prophecy made by one to whom God deigned to reveal himself, and communicated to a great servant of God, St. Vincent Ferrier, who reports it in his writings. Another servant of God has, in his turn, adopted and inserted it in the excellent work which he has left us, entitled, "*Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin. By the venerable Grignon de Montfort.*" We quote the remarkable passage from this work, which is a book most precious for souls who are able to penetrate its meaning: "I have said that the Most High, with His holy Mother, will form great saints, *who will surpass in sanctity the greater part of the other saints as much as the cedars of Lebanon surpass small shrubs*, as it has been revealed to a holy soul." (Page 29.)

But to return to Maria d'Agreda, I think it is not hazarding too much to affirm, that from the doctrine of the works of this servant of God will be formed the great saints announced in the preceding lines. Let us hear the response of the venerable author already quoted. "It will

some, and quickly, this happy time, this *age of Mary*, when souls, losing themselves in the abyss of her interior, will become the living copies of Mary, to love and glorify Jesus Christ. *Ut adveniat regnum tuum, adveniat regnum Maria.* May the reign of Mary come, so that the Kingdom of Christ may come."

We have, happily in favor of the opinion advanced here, an authority powerful and decisive for a large number of our readers, that of the pious and learned M. Emery. At the close of his long career, he said, while speaking of the works of Maria of Jesus d'Agreda: "It is only after having read and re-read them that I have understood the wise recommendation of our founder, M. Olier, '*study the interior of Jesus in Mary.*'" Now, it is by this means that the great saints of whom we speak must form themselves.

We might add much more, for God, in the mysterious designs of His merciful providence, has given to us also to know, by many proofs, that in these times He will shed abroad abundant treasures of grace; but this will suffice for those who can understand.

The title alone of our book will be sufficient to attract to it one class of readers, while, for the same reason, it will be rejected by others; for there are among the faithful, we mean even the good,

two classes very different from each other in the dispositions that actuate them respecting heavenly things. "There is a class of persons even numerous," says the learned Bishop of Birmingham, "to whom the annunciation of a miracle, or a voice from heaven, brings more pain than satisfaction, and who find in these a subject of disquietude rather than of joy or consolation. For these the supernatural has no charm—the world of spirits is very far from their thoughts and their hearts; their souls have no place of abode, no friends in these invisible countries; their belief in miraculous manifestations is only a general idea, and remote from their faith, and they feel no desire to witness them." Our readers will not be of this class.

Our book is not intended for persons such as those of whom we have just spoken. We do not ask them to read it, but we beseech them to be careful to remember that they have no right to blame, nor criticize, nor censure those who love to turn an attentive ear to miracles, to instructions which come from on high, when, on the other part, the wise precaution has been observed to wait until the Church has approved that which they are happy to believe. No doubt, and we know it well, too great credulity should be avoided. We must not hasten to seize with

ardor upon every rumor which is said to come from heaven, for this would be simplicity and folly, unless we had examined sufficiently the reasons for credibility. "But if," as St. Teresa has so excellently well said, "If it be simplicity to believe every thing, to wish to believe nothing is TEMERITY." The truth lies between these extremes.

For ourselves, in regard to supernatural things, as soon as we have heard of any, our disposition incline us to joy and happiness—the smile mounts to our lip. Is it not thus with the mother, when she hears that her son has just performed some brilliant action? Even before she has acquired the certainty of it she rejoices in advance. Thus we think we ourselves should feel. A contrary disposition seems to us—we will not say a sin or a crime, God only judges the heart and penetrates the conscience, and we do not assume this right—but we will say that to us it seems a bad symptom, and may be the root of a secret affiliation with the sentiments of the enemies of our faith in regard to divine things.

We conclude this introduction with the instruction—which we would wish to see graven in letters of gold, to be read by the whole world—that the august Queen of Heaven gave to her beloved daughter, Maria of Jesus d'Agreda, when

she had terminated all that related to the glorious Patriarch, St. Joseph. Would that these words might resound from pole to pole, and that our readers might never forget them!

"My daughter, although you have written that my spouse Joseph was one of the greatest saints and most noble princes of the celestial Jerusalem, you cannot now declare his eminent sanctity. Mortals can never know it until they enjoy the vision of God, in which they will with admiration discover the mystery, and they will praise the Lord for it. In the last day when all men will be judged, the unhappy damned will weep bitterly for not having known, because of their sins, this powerful and efficacious means for their salvation, and for not having availed themselves of it, as they could have done, to recover the grace of the just Judge. The world has been greatly ignorant of the magnitude of the prerogatives which the supreme Lord has accorded to my holy spouse, and how powerful is his intercession with His Divine Majesty; for be assured that he is one of the greatest favorites of God, and one of the most capable of appeasing His justice against sinners. I desire you to be most grateful to the goodness of the Lord for the favor which I have granted to you on this occa-

sion, and that you will render to Him continual thanks for the illumination that you have received touching this mystery. Endeavor also, in future, to augment your devotion for my holy spouse, and bless the Lord for that He has favored him with so much liberality, and also for the consolation that I enjoyed in bearing him company and knowing his perfections.

"You must avail yourself of his intercession in all your necessities, and so act as to multiply the numbers of his votaries. Recommend to your daughters to distinguish themselves in this devotion, since the Most High grants on earth that which my spouse requests in heaven, and He will unite to these requests extraordinary favors for men, provided they do not render themselves unworthy to receive them.

"All these privileges respond to the perfection, the innocence, and to the eminent virtues of this admirable saint, because they have attracted the complaisance of the Lord, who destines for him inconceivable largesses, and who desires to show great mercy to those who will have recourse to his intercession."

We touch upon the great age of the Church—that is to say, the age of Mary, and already we have entered it. The proofs of this fact abound, and seem to us decisive and irrefutable When

we call this age great, because it is the age of the august Mary, we have evidently nothing in view of the material grandeurs of modern times —neither the application of steam, nor the discoveries in electricity, nor those modern inventions admired and vaunted without measure. In our view, the true grandeurs of the times which begin is not found in these. This age will be great because it will produce eminent saints—saints superior to those we have had, and destined in heaven to a more brilliant crown. It is in this sense that the age on which we enter will be great by Mary, because of Mary—in Mary.

None among Christians will dispute that the age in which the divine Saviour came into the world—when the great queen of angels and men lived—was evidently the greatest. Nevertheless, the Redeemer and His holy Mother did nothing more than practice holiness and glorify God. They invented nothing material—taught nothing with a view to material progress. After the same manner, there will be great men who are about to appear on earth, or, rather, who are, as yet, unknown, for they live already.

Oh let us say, in conclusion, shall we not preserve during all the days of our lives a tender devotion for this glorious saint *who made a*

part of that which we denominate the TRINITY OF THE EARTH—*for this saint, who has no equal, and never can be equalled—whose grandeur and glory we can never know until it shall be given to us to see God face to face without fear of losing him!* "The unhappy damned," the Holy Virgin herself instructs us, "will weep bitterly for not having known, because of their sins, this means—so powerful and so efficacious for their salvation—the intercession of St. Joseph." May it not be so with us! Let us love, let us venerate the great and glorious spouse of Mary; let us confide in his protection, and praise God for having made him so powerful—for having endowed him with so many merits and privileges, and we shall have the joy to receive, by his intercession, an hundredfold for the little that, by the help of grace, we shall have done in honor of him who is seated in heaven on a glorious throne at the side of Jesus and Mary. Glory to God alone!

THE ABBÉ J. A. BOULLAN.

SENTIMENTS OF M. OLIER,

ON

THE DEVOTION TO ST. JOSEPH.*

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER.

The admirable St. Joseph was given to the world to represent, in a sensible manner, the adorable perfections of God the Father. In his person, alone, were enclosed His beauty, His purity, His love, His wisdom and His prudence, His mercy and His compassion. One saint only is

* We have thought that we could not better commence the Life of the Holy Patriarch, "*who had no equal, nor ever will have one on earth; of him whose merits and glory will never be known to men, until they enjoy the vision of God,*" (words of Mary of Jesus d'Agreda,) than by prefixing these pages, which a great servant of God has left us. The pious and seraphic founder of the company of St. Sulpice, M. Olier, has written, (as may be seen in *His Life*, by one of his worthy children,) through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, admirable things, the autographs of which have been found after a lapse of nearly 200 years. The article which we now offer to our well-beloved readers, is an extract from one of those autograph manuscripts, containing the sentiments entertained by this illustrious servant of God, through the gift of infused science, regarding the glorious spouse of Mary After having sought for and read all that has been written in favor of the glorious St. Joseph, we aver, in all sincerity, that we have never met with any thing, in our opinion, so sublime, so beautiful, so admirable, as these few pages. From this point of

destined to represent God the Father, while an infinitude of creatures, a multitude of souls represent Jesus Christ; for the whole Church labors to manifest to the world the virtues and perfections of her adorable Head. All the angels together are created to represent God and His perfections; one single man represents all His grandeur Thus we must regard the august St. Joseph as surpassing all: as the grandest, the most celebrated, the most incomprehensible, and, by proportion, like God the Father, invisible in his person and incomprehensible in his perfections. And is there not here wherewith to confound, to frighten our ignorance and our misery, seeing that whatever is purest, and holiest, is least capable of being known and understood by us? If St. Joseph, under this point of view, seems to us incomparable and placed in a class, apart, it is because he, alone, is the universal image of God the Father on earth. Hence it is, that, having chosen this saint to represent His image, He gave him a resemblance to Himself in His invisible and hidden nature, and, to my mind, this saint is not in a condition to be comprehended by the minds of men: so that faith must serve for us as the sup

view, it is easy to comprehend what the illustrious St. Theresa declares: "*I know by experience that St. Joseph helps us in every way.*" At a later period the Ven. M. Olier writes: "*The Eternal Father clothed Himself in the person of St. Joseph, and, veiled under the humanity of this great saint, He is become merciful—full of tenderness and sensibility for human miseries.*" May this great servant of God who has had communications so sublime respecting the glorious St. Joseph, render him favorable to us, and intercede for us before the throne of God, where, we doubt not, he occupies a distinguished place. It is not, however, our intention here to forestal in any thing, the supreme judgment of the Holy Church in this matter, for we are, and will always remain, her docile and devoted son,

J. A. R.

plement whereby to venerate in him what we are unable to understand.

§ I.

How God the Father honored the great St. Joseph.

St. Joseph having been chosen to be the image of God the Father, the virtues and perfections of this holy person offer admirable subjects for study. What wisdom! what strength! what prudence! what simplicity! Surely there was never any thing like them in the world: for it is easy to understand that, if God the Father chose this saint to be the idea and image of His perfections, if He rendered visible in him what He had from all eternity hidden in the secret of His being, the excellence of this great man must be incomparable.

1. *He is the image of the beauty of the Eternal Father.* —Without doubt he preserved a grave and modest exterior—he was of an admirable constitution—of beauty unparalleled, because of Him of whom he was the representation, to the Son of God Himself; for if the heavens, the earth, the elements—if, in a word, the whole structure of the world is so beautiful, so rare, so wonderful, and ordained with such due proportion of weight and number, and measure, because it must assist us to admire the perfections of God, and to represent to us His beauty, what ought not to be the beauty of his great saint—of this saint whom God the Father formed expressly to represent Himself to His only Son, to place continually before His eyes His true portrait and image, as a compensation in the time of His absence, and a sort of consolation during the years of His pilgrimage! And what is yet more worthy of consideration, is, that this world, so beautiful and so perfect, which every where

publishes the beauty of its author, represents to men only the admirable greatness of God, considered as a sovereign Being, and a perfect Essence, that is, as great, good, wise, and infinite; but it does not represent Him with the attraction and charms of a father; it manifests Him only as a sovereign, and as the First Cause; while St. Joseph, formed on the idea of the Eternal Father, to represent Him to His Son, exhibits Him in the character of a father, and contains in himself all the attractive features, all the charms and sweetness of the Divine paternity.

2. *He is the image of the holiness of the Eternal Father.* —What must not be the sanctity of St. Joseph, chosen to be the image of God the Father? This great saint lived in perfect holiness, separated from all worldly goods and from all creatures, and the Gospel introduces him to us as filled with this incomparable sanctity, saying, *Cum esset justus*, "because he was just," that is, holy. He is, besides, established in this unique character of sanctity, since he is destined to be the guardian of the creature who is the most holy and precious in the world. In fact our Lord chose a saint, and one of the greatest saints of the world to be the guardian of the most holy Virgin after His death; a saint who was in some sort the same as Himself, in short, a virgin man, to be the protector and guardian of His Mother. Here, God the Father chose a man whom He made the image of His holiness, so that he should be the guardian and protector not only of the Blessed Virgin, but also of His Son, whom He engenders eternally, *in sanctitate et justitiâ coram ipso.*

3. *He is the character and the image of the fecundity of the Eternal Father.*—The Church presents St. Joseph for our veneration eight days before the holy mystery of the Incarnation, in order that in St. Joseph we shall adore

God the Father, preparing and bearing within his bosom the designs of the holy mystery of His Son; this mystery being hidden throughout ages, the adorable mind of the Father is given to us to venerate in St. Joseph. It is for this reason that this saint is represented bearing in his arms, and on his bosom, our Lord Jesus Christ, as th. Father engendered Him in Himself from all eternity. The angels, who do not characterize the fecundity of God, are never termed fathers, the one of another; but St. Joseph, image of this Divine fecundity, is called the father of Jesus Christ. He personated the Eternal Father as a mystery, which God has borne, and engendered His Word Incarnate in Mary, and under whom He inspired the Divine substance. In this great saint God the Father appeared in His fecundity, yet separated from flesh and blood, which rank as nothing in the generation of the Son, *qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo natus est.*

4. *He is the image of the love of the Eternal Father for His Son.*—God the Father, in choosing St. Joseph as His image in regard to His Son, lived in the bosom of St. Joseph, where He loved His Son with an immense and infinite love, proclaiming continually of this only Son, *Hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi bene complacui.* The Father, in Himself, loves His Son as His Eternal Word; and in St. Joseph, He loves the same Son as the Incarnate Word. He abode in the soul of this great saint, and rendered him participant not only in His virtues, but also in His life and in His paternal love, and thus the blessed St. Joseph entered into the love of the Eternal Father for His Son, and loved Him to the extent, the ardor, the purity, and holiness of that love.

5. *St. Joseph is the exterior character of the compas-*

sion and tenderness of the Eternal Father for the miseries of men.—The Eternal Father, having chosen St. Joseph to be the image of His paternity, assumed in him a spirit of compassion and tenderness for the miseries of men, and made Himself, in him, the Father of mercies. Before His incarnation, the Word was full of rigor, *Vox tonitrui tui in rota, vox confringentis cedros.* But after He had become man, and made Himself sensible to our evils, He is full of meekness and tenderness; *Mitis et humilis corde:* He is moved with compassion for our wretchedness, and so has the Eternal Father done in communicating Himself to the great St. Joseph His image. From all eternity God the Father was separated from the flesh, elevated in holiness, infinitely above our condition; He was insensible to our evils, and full of severity towards men; but from the moment that He was clothed in the person of St. Joseph, and that He was veiled under the humanity of this great saint, He became merciful, full of tenderness and sensibility for human miseries. In him He is the Father of mercies, and, for this reason, St. Paul, after saying "Blessed be God," adds, "the Father of Jesus Christ, Father of mercies," meaning, that in making Himself the Father of Jesus Christ in St. Joseph, He became the Father of mercies, while formerly He was, in His being of God, just and impassible.

6. *St. Joseph is the image of the wisdom and prudence of the Eternal Father.*—Since God the Father willed to appear in the person of St. Joseph, He communicated abundantly to him His spirit of paternity, *ex quo omnis paternitas;* and, to guide the Eternal Wisdom, He endowed him with a wonderful intelligence and wisdom; for if God confides the guidance and protection of kingdoms to puissant angels, and even to the mightiest of these great

and sublime intelligences—if He charges these pure spirits with the conduct of the celestial spheres, and of those immense bodies, what should not be the grandeur of the saint to whom God confided the direction of His Son, more precious than a hundred millions of worlds, and a hundred millions of kingdoms! What illumination was necessary to conduct and direct in all things this Son, whose every step and movement were so precious and so dear! Ah! it is said, that the most Blessed Virgin had the perpetual view of God, and sometimes even the beatific vision, because of her Son. It is certain that her Divine Son had this clear and distinct view of the Divinity, in order that He should at every instant, do the will of His Father. *Quæ placita sunt ie facio semper;* and He did continually that which He saw Him do, *facio quæ video Patrem facientem*; either never to disobey Him, and to satisfy the adorable designs which God the Father had upon all His steps and all his movements, or because of all their importance to the human race. Now, the same reasons oblige us to believe that the great St. Joseph, charged with the conduct of Jesus, whom he was to lead forward to the accomplishment of the adorable designs of God, His Father, designs of such immense importance for the salvation of men, was himself enlightened with this Divine illumination, to do all things according to the spirit of God, and further, I venture to give utterance to a thought which comes into my mind, and which I dare not warrant, only because it seems novel. It is, that the light which was imparted to St. Joseph for the direction of the Son of God, was of the nature of that of the Blessed Virgin, which the holy doctors declare to have been glorious—God having bestowed upon her all the graces which His omnipotence can accord

to a mere creature. If, then, the light of St. Joseph was a glorious light, it must have been always infallible, to guide the Son of God, who could not err; for, otherwise, we should expose the Son of God, in His obedience to St. oseph, to fail in the designs of God and in His duty, or o disobey him who held for Him the place of father, and of whom it is expressly said: "He was obedient to them in all things," *et erat subditus illis.* Having been given by God to all men as the model of obedience, if He had disobeyed St. Joseph, each individual would have found in His disobedience a pretext to excuse his own, and to pretend that it is admissible to fail in obedience: that superiors are not possessed of all the requisite qualities to direct with certainty; and would not this be to make God deficient in His promises and in His providence, if He refused to superiors the intelligence which is necessary to direct us? No, never can we mistake, in obedience! God renders Himself guarantee for the persons who direct others. Jesus Christ, our Lord, would otherwise be in a worse condition than the rest of men, who cannot err in obeying. He would be in a worse conditron than the inferior angels, for these are submissive to their superiors with an entire confidence, and receive from them assured and infallible light for all their conduct, although it is so much less important than that of the Son of God. Now, if the angels, because they are glorious, have superiors who are gifted with a light of glory, what ought not to be that of St. Joseph, destined by God the Father to guide Jesus Christ as His inferior, and to govern the Blessed Virgin His Mother! And what shame to expose the Son of God to contest with His father, and against him who is filled with the spirit of God Himself. What! could God the Father have exposed our Lord to this unseemliness, by re

fusing to our saint a grace so proper and so necessary to his position? Our great saint is then filled with admirable wisdom, since God commits to him the conduct of the Incarnate Wisdom, *Christum, Dei Sapientiam;* and if God is accustomed to bestow graces in proportion to the eminence of the employments that He confides to us, what, then, has not been the illumination, the wisdom, to which Wisdom itself has been submitted?

St. Joseph was for Jesus Christ what Moses was, formerly, for the people of God. As this people, who were a figure of the Saviour, were withdrawn from Egypt by Moses, so our Lord was also brought out of it by St. Joseph; for we see in this passage from St. Matthew, taker from Osea, *Ex Ægypto vocavi filium meum*—that the people of Israel, in Egypt, are called the Son of God, because they were the figure of Jesus Christ. St. Joseph was, in fact, the protector of the life of Jesus Christ in His flight into Egypt—*Protector salvationum Christi sui*—and he was His safeguard during the course of his life.

O Eternal Wisdom! if Moses enjoyed such intimate communication with Thee that he saw Thee face to face, what was not that of St. Joseph? The first, who was to conduct Thy Son under a figure, saw Thee face to face; and the second, who was to direct Thy Son Himself, was he not crowned with still greater favors? If he who brought the law of death was in such glory—even in this life—that the children of Israel could not support the brilliancy that shone from His face, how was it, adds St. Paul, with him who bore in his arms the Law of Life, and of the Holy Spirit? Without doubt, he enjoyed the adorable contemplation, and the beatific vision of God.

I give utterance to this thought, and draw these consequences from it, as those of my own mind, enlightened,

nevertheless, as it seems to me, by the light of faith, being sensible of no activity, nor labor of my understanding, to produce them. I leave them to the judgment of my spiritual director.

§ II.

How much Jesus Christ has honored the great St. Joseph.

The Son of God, having made Himself visible, in taking human flesh, conversed and communed visibly with God His Father, veiled under the person of St. Joseph, by whom His Father rendered Himself visible to Him. The most Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, together, represented one single and same person, that of God the Father. They were two sensible representatives of God—two images, under which He adored the plenitude of His Father, either in His eternal fecundity, or in His temporal Providence, or in His love for this Son himself, and His Church. They were, so to speak, a holy oratory for Jesus Christ, and the sensible object of all His devotion. Without doubt, the temple was, for Him, a religious place, since He saw, in this edifice, a dead and material figure of God His Father. But here He saw a figure—living, spiritual and divine—of all His grandeur and perfections, *templo hic major est.* He saw in him the secrets of His Father, and by the mouth of this great saint, He heard the word of His Father, of whom St. Joseph was the visible organ. He was the oracle of Jesus Christ, who caused Him to know all the will of His heavenly Father. He was His dial, who indicated all the moments, marked in the decrees of God. It was before this oratory, that, addressing His Father, He said *Pater noster*, and that He invoked Him in behalf of the whole Church. What an object of love for Jesus Christ!

What a subject for complaisance, and for the exercise of His love! What caresses and sentiments of loving tenderness! Great saint! thou wast happy in being the object of the love of Jesus! Oh, God! what exchanges of love and complaisance! Goodness of my Jesus, how Thou art pleased to have before Thine eyes wherewithal to satisfy Thy love! Happy Joseph! Happy Jesus! Happy Joseph, to furnish to Jesus the most worthy subject for His delight! Most blessed art Thou, O Jesus, to find in Joseph the object of Thy holy complaisance! The eyes of Thy spirit see in him the spirit of Thy Father, and the eyes of Thy body see in him a visible image of His beauty, so that in him alone Thou dost find perfect contentment.

It is an admirable life—that of God the Father in Eternity, loving His Son, and the Son, reciprocally, loving the Holy Spirit. That, too, was an admirable life of Joseph and Mary, images of God the Father for Jesus Christ His Son. What was not their love for Jesus, and the love of Jesus for them! Our Lord saw in both the presence, the life, the substance, the person, and the perfections of God His Father; and, beholding these beauties, what love! what joy! what consolation He experienced! The Holy Virgin and St. Joseph, seeing, on their side, the person of God in Jesus, with all that He is—Son of God, Word of the Father, the "splendor of His glory and the figure of His substance." What reverence! what respect! what absorbing love! what profound adoration they manifested! It was a heaven—a paradise on earth. Delights without end were there, even in this vale of tears—an abundance of all good things in the bosom of poverty: glory was already begun in the midst of the lowness, the abjection, the littleness of their life.

O, Jesus! I cease to be astonished that Thou didst remain thirty entire years in this happy abode, without quitting St. Joseph. It surprises me not that Thou wert inseparable from his person. His house alone was a paradise for Thee, and his bosom the bosom of Thy Father, from whom Thou art inseparable, and in whom Thou possessest eternal bliss. Out of this abode Thou didst find nought but subjects of ruin—sinners, and the fatal causes of Thy death. But in the dwelling of Joseph, which was also that of Mary, Thou didst ever find the cherished objects of Thy delights, the holy sources of Thy life. Thou wentest forth from this blessed place only to visit the temple, and the world mocked at Thy solitude and this retired life. But they knew not that the temple was but a dead figure of the bosom of Thy Father, and that St. Joseph, His living image, was the place of Thy pleasure and repose.

Who, then, can declare the excellence of our saint—the great respect which our Lord bore to him, and the devoted love of the Holy Virgin; Jesus Christ regarding in him the Eternal Father as His Father, and the Blessed Virgin revering in His person the same Eternal Father as her spouse?

§ III.

St. Joseph, Patron of Hidden and Perfect Souls.

St. Joseph, having been chosen by God to be His image towards His only Son, was not marked out for any public function in the Church of God, but merely to be the expression of His purity and the incomparable sanctity which separates Him from every visible creature; and hence he is the patron of hidden and unknown souls. Far different

are the functions of St. Peter in the Church, from the operations of St. Joseph within it. St. Peter is established to control its exterior in its government and administrations, to preserve its doctrines, and to direct its prelates nd ministers. St. Joseph, on the contrary, who is a saint hidden, and without external functions, is appointed to communicate interiorly the super-eminent life which he receives from the Father, and which afterwards flows through Jesus Christ upon us. The influence of St. Joseph is a participation of that of God the Father in His Son; while that of St. Peter and the other saints is a participation of the grace of Jesus Christ descending on men, and distributing itself by measure among His members. That of St. Joseph is a participation, without measure, of the source which flows from God the Father into His Son; and God the Father, who loves us with the same love with which He loves this only Son, permits us to draw, to taste, to relish in St. Joseph the grace and the love with which He loves this Son. In the other saints, it is in part and by measure that He communicates it; here it is, without bounds or measure, because of what St. Joseph is, and because of that which God the Father bestows on him as His universal image. This saint is the patron of sublime souls who are elevated to the purity and the sanctity of God, as well as of those who are intimately united to Jesus Christ, and to whom he communicates his tenderness for this loving Saviour; and, also, of such as are devoted to God the Father, of whom St. Joseph is a figure. He is a hidden saint whom God willed to hold in secret during his life, and for whom alone He has reserved the interior occupations, without partaking in the exterior cares of the Church; a saint whom God manifests in the depths of hearts, and whom He has Himself stamped for

veneration in the interior of souls. And as St. Joseph devoted himself to God alone during his life, God reserves it to Himself to make him known, and to establish for him esteem, devotion, and veneration. As the image of the Eternal Father, who is the end of all prayer, and the object and end of all our religion, St. Joseph should be the universal tabernacle of the Church; and, for this reason, the soul interiorly united to Jesus Christ, and who enters into His ways and His dispositions, as long as it remains on earth, will be filled with love, with respect, and tenderness for St. Joseph, in imitation of Jesus Christ living upon earth; for such were the inclinations and dispositions of Jesus Christ. He went to love God the Father with tenderness in St. Joseph, and to adore Him under this living image, where He really abode. It is for us to follow this conduct, and to seek our Father in this saint. It is in him that we should go to see, to contemplate, to adore, all the divine perfections, the assemblage of which will make us perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect. We learn from this saint that we can resemble God the Father, and be perfect on earth as He is in heaven. And because that, in God the Father, St. Joseph is the source of all good and of all mercy, it is said of this saint, that we can ask nothing from him that we shall not obtain.

§ IV.

St. Joseph, Patron of Priests.

It is especially for priests, in whom God abides in His plenitude and in His pure and virginal fecundity, to conduct themselves after the model of the great St. Joseph, with regard to the children whom they spiritually en-

gender. This great saint conducted and directed the infant Jesus in the spirit of His Father, imitating His meekness, His wisdom, His prudence; and thus should we act towards all the members of Jesus Christ who are confided to us, and who are other Christs; we should, therefore, treat them with the same reverence as that of St. Joseph towards the Infant Jesus. Let us be superiors in God in regard to them, but inferiors in our persons like St. Joseph, who felt himself infinitely below Jesus Christ, although he had the direction of Him, and was set above Him, in the name and place of the Eternal Father. Hence, we have chosen St. Joseph for one of the patrons of the seminary of St. Sulpice, as the saint whom our Lord has charged in heaven with the express care of priests, as He, in His goodness, has made known to me. The Blessed Virgin also gave me this great saint for my patron, assuring me that he was the patron of hidden souls, adding these words concerning him: "*I have nothing dearer, in heaven or on earth, after my Son.*" One day, while bearing our Lord to a sick person, I repeated to myself these words which came into my mind: "*Dux justi fuisti*"—which reminded me that St. Joseph, having been the conductor of the Just, who is our Lord, I should represent him, in bearing the Son of God, with the same sentiments with which he had so often borne Him during his life.—*From the Autograph Manuscripts of the Ven. M. Olier.*

DEVOTION OF ST. TERESA FOR ST. JOSEPH.

* * * * * * I chose for patron and intercessor the glorious St. Joseph, and recommended myself earnestly to him; and I acknowledge that at, and from that time, and on many occasions which concerned even my honor and my salvation, this great saint has afforded me more important and prompt assistance than I could have dared to ask of him. I do not remember, even to the present moment, ever having prayed him to grant me any favor which I have not obtained, neither can I think, without astonishment, of the graces which God has bestowed on me by his intercession, nor of the perils from which he has delivered me, both in soul and body. It seems that God accords to other saints the grace to succor us in certain cases; but I know, by experience, that St. Joseph helps us in all things, as if our Lord would show to us, that as He was submissive to him on earth, because he held for Him the place, and bore the name of His Father, He can refuse him nothing in heaven.

Other persons, whom I have counselled to have recourse to him, have had a similar experience—many now have a great devotion for him, and I perceive every day more and more the truth of what I have just said. * * * * * * My experience of the graces which God ac-

cords through the intercession of this eminent saint, makes me wish to be able to persuade all the world to have a great devotion for him, for I never have known any one who had the true devotion, and who gave proof of it in his actions, who was not advanced by it in virtue. During many years, I do not remember having ever asked any thing on his festival which I have not obtained; and if there happened to be some imperfection in the aid which I implored of him, he repaired the fault, and caused it to succeed to my advantage. * * * * * * I will, therefore, in these present circumstances, do no more than, in the name of God, entreat those who do not believe what I say to put it to the proof, and they will learn, by experience, how advantageous it is to recommend themselves to this great patriarch with a particular devotion. Persons given to mental prayer ought, it seems to me, to be warmly affectioned towards him; for I cannot comprehend how we can think of all the time that the Holy Virgin lived with Jesus Christ Infant, without gratitude to St. Joseph for the assistance which he rendered them; and those who have need of a director to instruct them in meditation need only take this admirable saint for their guide to avoid being led astray. May God grant that I am not misled myself in this my boldness, which I have indulged, thus to speak of, and publish the respect which I entertain for him, after having so often failed to serve and imitate him! My restoration to health was an effort of his power; I rose from my bed—I walked—I ceased to be helpless:—and the bad use that I made of such a blessing was an effect of my little virtue.—*Extract from the Life of St. Teresa by Herself.*

THE

ADMIRABLE LIFE

OF THE

GLORIOUS PATRIARCH, ST. JOSEPH

CHAPTER I.

ESPOUSALS OF THE CHASTE ST. JOSEPH WITH THE BLESSED VIRGIN.—VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ACCOMPANIED THIS MYSTERIOUS MARRIAGE.

THE Blessed Virgin Mary, after her entrance into the temple, had made, in the presence of all the angelic hosts, a vow of chastity. This most chaste dove had renounced earthly attachments, and the love of all creatures, that she might have no other spouse than God himself; but at the age of thirteen years and a half, it was manifested to our sweet Lady in a vision, that she should enter into the marriage estate. "The Lord tempted Abraham," said Moses,—and also

the Lord tempted our august Mistress; in which we discover the truth of these words: "The judgments of the Lord are incomprehensible, and His ways are above our ways." The thoughts of the pure Mary were far removed from those of the Most High, for she had desired and resolved to have no husband, so far as it depended upon her own will.

The Lord spoke in a dream to the high-priest, who was St. Simeon, and commanded him to make preparations for the marriage of Mary, daughter of Joachim and Anna of Nazareth, and to convoke an assemblage of the other priests to deliberate upon the subject. St. Simeon obeyed the divine behest, and the assembled doctors, inspired by a celestial impulse, resolved, that in an affair upon which the Lord had declared His good pleasure, they ought to consult His holy will by praying, that He would manifest, by a sign, him who should be the husband of Mary, and that he should be of the house and lineage of David, that the law might be fulfilled. They therefore resolved to appoint a day when all the young men of this family, present in Jerusalem, should be invited to assemble in the temple. It was precisely the day on which our blessed Lady had attained her fourteenth year.

The Priest Simeon summoned the chaste Mary, in order to make known to her this resolution. It was nine days before that on which their designs were to be put in execution. During this time the most blessed Virgin redoubled her prayers, her tears, and sighs, for the accomplishment of the will of God in an event which caused her the greatest pain. The Lord consoled her, saying: "I will give you a spouse who will not oppose your holy desires, but who will rather, by the help of my grace, confirm them I will choose him for you perfect, and according to my own heart, and I will elect him for you from among my servants." The holy angels also consoled her, saying: "The Most High will guide you in the way which is the best, the most perfect, the most holy."

Joseph was born at Nazareth; nevertheless, by the disposition of the Most High, he had come to dwell in Jerusalem, because of certain reverses of fortune, which resulted so favorably for him that he had the happiness to become the spouse of her whom God had chosen to be His own Mother, under the circumstances that we are about to relate.

The day appointed by the priests arrived. Our blessed Lady had completed the fourteenth year of her age. The young men of the tribe of

Judah, and of the family of David, from whom the august Mary was descended, who were in the City of Jerusalem, were assembled. Joseph, originally of Nazareth, but now an inhabitant of the holy city, was invited to be with them, because he, too, was of that royal race. He was then thirty-three years of age, well made, and possessed of an agreeable physiognomy, which expressed an incomparable modesty. He was indeed as chaste in his thoughts and deeds, as in his inclinations; and having made a vow of chastity when but twelve years old, his life was pure and irreproachable before God and man. He was related to the Virgin Mary in the third degree.

Inspired by the Most High, the chief-priest placed in the hands of each of these young men a dry rod, in order that by this means the Lord should manifest him whom he had chosen to be the husband of Mary. All united their prayers to those of the priests, for none were ignorant of the virtues and modesty of this holy maiden, nor of the reputation of her beauty, and her possessions, as an only child; and each desired to make her his wife. Joseph alone, the most humble, the most pious among them, deemed himself unworthy of so great a boon; and, calling to mind his vow of chastity

he resolved anew to observe it, resigning himself to the divine will even to the end of his life. But this did not prevent him from entertaining for the virtuous maiden veneration and esteem beyond any of his compeers.

All were engaged in prayer, when they saw blossoms burst forth from the rod borne by Joseph, and at the same instant a beautiful dove was seen to descend, which alighted on the head of the saint. The Lord, at the same moment, spoke to him interiorly, and said: "Joseph, my servant, Mary shall become your spouse, receive her with assiduity and respect, for she is very agreeable in my eyes; she is good and most pure in body and mind, and you will do all that she will tell you." The priests, upon this sign from heaven, determined to give St. Joseph to Mary for her husband. They then called for her, who was more excellent than the sun, more beautiful than the moon, and she appeared with a majesty more than angelic; with a loveliness, modesty, and grace incomparable; and the priests espoused her to Joseph, the most chaste and the most holy of men. The august Mary, with mingled modesty and tenderness, took leave of the priests and of her mistress,—asking pardon of her companions, and expressing her grateful

sense of all the kindness she had received from them; then, accompanied by many of the most distinguished ministers of the temple, she departed with her saintly spouse for Nazareth, the country of the newly-married pair, where lay the possessions of the blessed parents of our sweet Lady.

On their arrival, they were received and visited by all their relatives and friends, with the usual rejoicings on similar occasions; and having religiously acquitted themselves of all those duties which custom commanded in their intercourse with the world, our holy spouses at length found themselves alone in their house. It was a custom among the Jews, that the newly espoused, during the first days of their union, should study together their natural inclinations, in order to promote their future peace.

On one of these days, St. Joseph said to his spouse Mary: "I give thanks to the Most High God for having granted me the favor to choose me for your husband, when I did not in the least merit this honor, and when I believed myself unworthy to bear you company. But His Divine Majesty, who can, when He will, uplift the poor, has showed His mercy towards me. I desire that you will aid me with your goodness and your virtues in offering Him my

thanksgivings. In all that regards His service, I will be your servant. I pray you to supply my deficiencies in those qualities which I have not, but which, as your husband, I ought to possess. Only make me know your wishes, that I may fulfil them."

His most holy consort replied to the saint: "I am well pleased, that the Most High, having destined me for marriage, has had the goodness to choose you for my husband and my master, and, with your permission, I will now express the thoughts and intentions which I wish to impart to you on this subject."

The prevenient grace of the Most High inflamed anew the heart of St. Joseph with His divine love. "Speak," he said, "for thy servant heareth." The Queen of the universe was attended by her thousand angels; for the most pure Mary comprehended the respect and attention to be observed in conversation with her spouse; and that she might have more abund ant grace and merits, the Lord had continued in her the reserve and fear that she had in speaking alone with a man, which had never before happened to her, except, it might be in some casual encounter with the chief-priest. The august Virgin then said to St. Joseph: "It is just that we offer thanks, and give glory and

praise to our God and Creator, who has made His mercy to shine upon us, in choosing us for His service. In my most tender youth, I consecrated myself to God by a vow which I made, to be, during all my life, chaste in body and mind, and my desire to preserve my faith to Him is unchangeable. I trust that you will help me to fulfil this vow, and in all things else I will be your servant. Accept, my husband, this holy resolution, and confirm it by your own, so that we may obtain the eternal joys for which we aspire."

The chaste Joseph, filled with joy, replied: "In declaring to me your chaste thoughts and holy resolutions, you have penetrated and opened my heart, which, until you had revealed your own, I was unwilling to uncover. The Lord called me, also, at an early age, that I should love Him with an upright mind. Know, then, that in my twelfth year I, too, made a promise to serve God in perpetual chastity. I now renew this vow, and, with His grace, I will be your faithful servant, and I pray you to receive my chaste affections, and to regard me as your brother."

During this conversation the Most High confirmed anew in the heart of St. Joseph the virtue of chastity, and the pure and holy love

which he should bear to the blessed Virgin, his spouse. Thus he was possessed by this love in an eminent degree, and our august Queen augmented it, and enraptured his heart by her conversation. By this divine assistance the holy spouses enjoyed inexpressible consolation. The august Queen promised to second the desires of St. Joseph, and the Most High imbued him with such an exalted purity, and such an absolute control of his passions, that he served his consort without obstacle, and with a grace as admirable as it was extraordinary. In serving her, he followed the will and the good pleasure of the Lord.

They made a division of the effects which St. Joachim and St. Anna had left to their blessed child. One part was offered to the temple, where she had been educated; the second was devoted to the service of the poor, and the third was placed at the disposal of St. Joseph. For herself, our Queen reserved only the care to serve and employ herself within the house, for she dispensed herself always from the affairs of buying and selling.

In his youth St. Joseph had learned the carpenter's trade, as being one of the most useful to gain a livelihood, for he was without property. He inquired of his saintly spouse if she

would consent that he should practise the trade to gain something for the poor, and also as a means to avoid idleness. The most prudent Virgin consented, and reminded St. Joseph that it was not the will of God they should be rich, but poor, and protectors of the poor, so far as their abilities permitted. After this, the two holy spouses had an humble dispute, in which each wished to obey the other as superior. But the most humble Mary, who was the humblest of the humble, was victorious in her humility, and the man being the head, she would not permit the order of nature to be reversed. She therefore obtained the consent of her husband to receive her obedience in all things. She asked only permission to give alms to the poor, to which the saint consented.

During these first days, St. Joseph, by a new light from above, had penetrated the character of his spouse. Her rare prudence, her profound humility, her incomparable purity, and her possession of every virtue beyond all that he could have hoped, enraptured him with admiration. With a spirit full of joy, and his heart inflamed with ardent affection, he ceased not to praise the Lord, and to offer Him thanks for having bestowed on him so unmerited a treasure. The Lord had also so ordered,

that the Queen of Heaven, by her mien and by her presence, inspired her spouse with such mingled sentiments of reverence and respect, that we find no terms to express them. To the eyes of St. Joseph a radiant splendor shone from the lineaments of our Lady, like that of Moses when he descended from the mount.

Afterwards, in a vision, the blessed Virgin heard these words: "You perceive how faithful I am in my promises: the companionship of my servant Joseph will aid you to preserve the laws of my spouse; obey him as you ought, and be careful of his happiness." She replied: "With the divine favor and help, I will obey Thy servant Joseph, and serve him."

Their marriage had been celebrated on the 8th of September, and until the 25th of March, when the Word became Incarnate, the two spouses had lived in such wise that the Most High prepared them for the work for which they had been chosen.

But let us pause to express our joy on witnessing the fortunate destiny of the happiest among mortals, St. Joseph. Whence comes to thee, O man of God, so eminent a benediction, that among all the children of Adam it can be said of thee alone that God has been so entirely thine that He was taken for thy Son? The

eternal Father gives thee His daughter; the Son places His own Mother in thy charge; the Holy Spirit confides to thee His spouse, and places thee in His stead, and the Holy Trinity gives thee His elect, His only one, for thy lawful spouse. Great saint, dost thou then comprehend all thy dignity? dost thou fathom all thy greatness? Dost thou know that she whom thou hast just received as thy wife is Queen and Mistress of heaven and earth, and that thou art the depositary of the inestimable treasures of God himself? Behold, O man of God, the precious pledge thou hast, and know that if thou dost not render the Angels and the Seraphim envious, thy happiness, and the wonderful mystery of thine espousals excite their wondering admiration. For such joys and favors receive congratulations in the name of the whole human race. For thou art the spouse of her who has only God above her. Thou shalt be powerful and happy among men and angels. Be mindful of our poverty and wretchedness, and of me, miserable worm of the earth, for I desire to be thy faithful servant, and to be enriched and favored by thy powerful protection.

CHAPTER II

THE GLORIOUS ST. JOSEPH, CONSIDERED IN ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CONCERN THE MYSTERY OF THE VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, HIS WIFE.

IT is recorded in the Holy Scriptures (Prov. xxxi. 11) in reference to Mary: "The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and he shall have no need of spoils." Certain it is that the holy Joseph was called the husband of Mary, because she was his lawful wife. It is equally evident that he trusted in her, hoping that through her incomparable virtue, all things to be desired would follow her. But he trusted in her most of all a little later, when, still in ignorance of the mystery, he saw her *enceinte*; because then he believed and trusted in hope against hope, for, from the evidences which appeared, he could find no satisfaction but in his confidence in the holiness of such a woman. And although he resolved to leave her, because he saw the effect before his eyes, knowing

nothing of the cause, still he dared not doubt either her modesty or her discretion, neither could he separate himself from the pure and holy love with which the most chaste heart of such a wife had inspired him.

Thus he neither considered himself deceived nor poor in spoils,—for if all be termed spoils which is above what is necessary, all was in superabundance for this happy husband, when he was made acquainted with the dignity of his wife, and of that which was inclosed within her bosom. In fact, the truly chaste and faithful Joseph (who took the utmost care of all that concerned our holy Esther, and who influenced her continually to pray for the freedom of his people, for this was the ordinary occupation of our incomparable saint and his most pure spouse) was elevated by her means to such an extraordinary sanctity and so excellent a dignity, that the Supreme Majesty gave him His seal-ring, so that by this mark of honor he should command the same God made man, who was submitted to him, as it is said by the Evangelist, Luke, ii. 51.

Let us not forget to record that the Word made man, as soon as He had been conceived in the chaste womb of the most pure Mary, having first performed His duties toward God, prayed

for His Mother and for St. Joseph, supplicating for them eternal blessedness.

The august Mary, aged fourteen years, six months and seventeen days, had conceived in her blessed womb the Word made man under the miraculous circumstances which may be seen in her *life.** Now she learned from the discourse of the celestial ambassador, St. Gabriel, that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived six months before. The Most High had revealed to her that the son of Elizabeth would be great before the Lord, that he would be a prophet and the precursor of the Incarnate Word. At the same time, our blessed Lady knew that it would be pleasing to the Lord if she should visit her cousin, in order that the son, whom she bore in her womb, might be sanctified by the presence of their Saviour.

The Most High said to her: "I will that you go and visit Elizabeth, because We choose her son for great things, which are of Our good pleasure.' The prudent Mary replied: "My heart and my desires are entirely consecrated to Thy divine will, and I will execute with diligence all that Thou shalt command Thy most humble handmaid to perform. Allow me

* For these the reader is referred to the *Cité Mystique*.

to ask permission of Joseph, my husband, that I may make this journey with his consent."

After this vision, the humble Mary resolved to ask the permission of St. Joseph; and, without revealing to him the command of God, but with rare prudence, she said: "I know, by a divine illumination, that the goodness of the Most High has favored my cousin Elizabeth, wife of Zachariah, in giving her a son, whom she had so greatly desired. I think I am obliged by customary usages to go and visit her, to offer my sympathy, and to promote her spiritual welfare. If this journey be agreeable to you, I will make it, with your permission, being submissive entirely to your will. Consider what will be for the best, and tell me what I shall do." The discreet silence and humble submission of Mary were pleasing to the Lord. He therefore disposed the heart of Joseph by a divine light to do as she desired. Guided by this celestial light, the holy husband replied: "I confide as I ought in your great virtue, because I know that your well-regulated will would undertake nothing which is not for the greater glory of God, as this journey must be. And that no one may be surprised to see you go without your husband, I will, with the greatest pleasure, accom-

pany and serve you. Determine, then, the day of departure."

The blessed Virgin thanked her prudent spouse for the affection which he manifested for her, and they decided to set out immediately for the house of Elizabeth. St. Joseph prepared provisions for the journey,—some fruit, bread, and a few small fishes, which he purchased. He had also a little beast of burden, which was lent him to carry his provisions, and his spouse, the Queen of all that is created. With this equipage they set out for Judea. They had scarcely left their house, when our Queen, kneeling before St. Joseph, asked his blessing, in order to begin the day in the name of the Lord. The saint hesitated, for, by long experience, he knew the excellence of his spouse, but the holy and sweet importunities of the august Mary conquered, and he blessed her in the name of the Most High.

"*At that time*," saith the sacred text, "*Mary, rising up, went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judea.*" Now the chaste spouses, Mary and Joseph, having left their father's house, and forgotten their people, took their way towards the house of Zachariah, among the hills of Judea, distant twenty-seven leagues from Nazareth. The roads were rough, and

they possessed no means of transport except such as were afforded by their little animal; nevertheless the most humble and modest of creatures, Mary, prayed St. Joseph to use it for himself. The discreet spouse would not, by any means, consent to this; but in complaisance, he allowed her from time to time to go on foot with him, requesting her with great respect not to refuse him this gratification; and the Queen of heaven obeyed.

They continued their journey in these humble debates, and thus they so well employed their time, that there was not a moment which was not filled by some act of virtue. They walked alone, but the angels assisted them in all things; yet they were visible only to the august Mary. Occasionally she conversed with these angels, and the most pure heart of our sweet Lady was kindled anew with divine love. St. Joseph contributed to all this by his discreet silence, concentrating his thoughts within, and yielding himself to sublime contemplations. At other times the spouses conversed together upon many things regarding the salvation of their souls, the coming of the Messiah, the prophecies which the ancient fathers had received on this point, and other mysteries and secrets of the Most High.

During this journey there happened to St. Joseph something which excited his wonder. Inspired by a special grace, he bore to his spouse a most tender and holy love, and the saint, being of a noble nature, amiable, agreeable and obliging, was inclined to an ever watchful care for her. Now, as the Queen of heaven carried in her virginal bosom the Incarnate Word, the saint was sensible that, through the words and conversation of his spouse, new impressions were made upon his soul, but of the cause he was ignorant. He found himself more and more inflamed by divine love, and in a higher knowledge of those mysteries which formed the subjects of their conversation; and the further they advanced on their way and in their discussions, the more these favors were augmented. He felt also that the words of his spouse served as the organ, by means of which these favors were communicated to him. It was not possible that the discreet St. Joseph should not reflect upon this new and wonderful influence. But although it would have afforded him, filled as he was with wonder, the greatest gratification, without curiosity, to have been informed of the cause of it, his modesty was such that he could not venture to ask to be enlightened.

Our blessed Lady penetrated the thought of her spouse, but, ignorant of the way by which God would conduct this mystery, her great prudence and her own discretion taught her, although she had no command from the Lord to conceal it, how good it was to guard the secret of the most sublime of all mysteries. She therefore concealed it, without making it known to her spouse either on this occasion, or afterwards, during the interior pains which St. Joseph suffered on this account. What admirable prudence! Our sweet Lady prayed to God for the saint, imploring the divine assistance, of which she forsaw he would have need, and of which we shall treat in the following chapter.

This was the first journey which the Incarnate Word made in this world, four days after his entrance into it. Our blessed Lady thus served as a car for the true Solomon (Cant. iii. 9). This journey lasted four days, during which our holy travellers, besides those interior virtues which have God for their object, performed many acts of charity towards their neighbors. The blessed Virgin cured, among others, a poor sick girl, in a village through which she passed, on the first day of her departure.

At length the august Mary and her spouse Joseph arrived at the city of Judea, which was

then inhabited by Elizabeth and Zachariah This city was distant, as I have said, twenty seven leagues from Nazareth, and about two leagues from Jerusalem, near the spot where the torrent of Sorec has its source. It was afterwards entirely ruined, but the Lord does not permit the memory of places so venerable to be altogether lost. The Visitation was made at the same place where these divine mysteries are now honored by the faithful who dwell in Palestine, and by pilgrims who go there to offer their devotions.

St. Joseph went on before to give notice to the inmates of the house, and, having knocked at the door, he saluted them, saying: "May the Lord be with you, and fill your souls with His divine grace." St. Elizabeth had been already warned of their coming, for the same Lord had revealed to her that her cousin Mary of Nazareth was on her way to visit her. Now, having heard of her arrival, she came forth quickly, with others of her family to receive the holy Virgin, who saluted her first, saying: "*The Lord be with you, my dear cousin.*" "*And may the same Lord,*" replied Elizabeth, "*reward you for having taken the trouble to give me this consolation.*"

The two cousins having retired together, it

was then that the great mystery of the sanctification of John Baptist was operated; but those facts do not belong to this history. Coming out of their retreat, in the dusk of the evening, St. Elizabeth, who was informed of the happiness of the chaste St. Joseph, of which he was himself ignorant, bestowed upon him every mark of esteem and veneration.

After the saint had passed three days in the house of Zachariah, he asked permission of his blessed spouse to return to Nazareth. He took leave, with the promise to return and reconduct our sweet Lady when she should express her wishes. St. Elizabeth offered him presents praying him to accept them, but he received only a few things, because this man of God was not only a lover of poverty, but he had also a magnanimous and generous heart. He then took the road to Nazareth with the little beast that he had borrowed. Having arrived at his house, he was served there, in the absence of his spouse, by a relative who lived near,—the same who had been accustomed to bring them supplies from without, when the holy Lady was there.

After having passed three months, less two days,* in the house of Zachariah, in the midst

* In counting eight days after the Word was incarnate, the

of events and prodigies which do not belong to this history,* the august Mary thought of departure. St. Joseph, having been notified by St. Elizabeth, left Nazareth to reconduct his spouse to her home. On his arrival at the house of Zachariah, he was received with the highest marks of respect, for the holy priest already knew that the great patriarch was the depositary of the mysteries and the treasures of heaven. The blessed Virgin received him with discreet demonstrations of joy, and having placed herself on her knees before him, according to her custom, she asked his benediction. After he had taken some repose, they fixed on the day of departure. Their adieux being made, the happy patriarch, joyous again to possess his treasure, although he knew not as yet its full value, set out for Nazareth. The blessed Virgin, as usual, asked his blessing, and, pursuing their way, in four days they reached their place of destination. During their route, the same effects attended their divine colloquies as those which have been already indicated.

holy Virgin and St. Joseph arrived the second of April, towards evening, at the house of Zachariah. If we add three months, less two days, which should commence the third of April, we come to the first of July inclusively, which is the eighth day after the birth of John Baptist, and that of his circumcision.

* All these details will be found in the *Cité Mystique* of Marie d'Agreda.

The discreet Mary perceived that she could not long conceal her condition from her chaste and faithful spouse. But the Lord guided all by means the most conducive to His glory, and to obtain merits for St. Joseph and the Virgin Mother. For this reason He did not make known to them His good pleasure. On their journey, the august Queen met with a woman who had once been virtuous, but who, tempted by the devil, was led into sin, and afterwards possessed by him. As soon as our blessed Lady saw her, she discovered her malady, and, using her queenly power, commanded the evil spirit to depart from the woman, and, having delivered her from the consequences of her sin, she obtained for her the gift of perseverance.

Our holy travellers arrived one day at a hostelry, the master of which was of a vicious disposition, and led a disorderly life. The Lord ordained, as the preparation for his coming happiness, that he should receive the august Mary and St. Joseph with marks of benevolence and consideration. He bestowed attentions and rendered them services beyond those he was accustomed to offer to other strangers. Our Queen, who knew the depraved state of his conscience, offered prayers for her host, and procured the justification of his soul, and the amendment of his life.

At length they reached Nazareth, when the Queen of heaven, assisted by the holy angels put her house in order. St. Joseph occupied himself as usual, for the subsistence of our Lady, and she did nothing to damp the hopes of her spouse. After her return home, Lucifer tempted the august Mary in every way, but he was vanquished with all his infernal legions, and precipitated into the depths of hell. While the Lord had permitted Lucifer to show himself, this enemy had contrived to sow discord among the neighbors of St. Joseph. They came together, and, having called for the innocent Mary, they accused her in the presence of her husband, and in the bitterest terms, of troubling the peace of their families. This reproach was keenly felt by our queen, because of the pain which it caused to her spouse, for he had begun to remark something of her condition; and already suffered anxiety and trouble on this account, as we shall see in the following chapter. Now, the demon, ignorant of the real cause of this trouble, strove to plant the seeds of discontent within the bosom of St. Joseph, so as to make him impatient of his poverty; representing to him at the same time that his spouse Mary remained too long in her retreat and devotions, and that she was idle. But St. Joseph

being of an upright and magnanimous heart, and of great perfection, despised these diabolical inventions, and utterly rejected them. Besides, his internal suffering regarding the state of his spouse occupied him so exclusively, that it obliged him to forget every other. The Lord delivered him from this temptation by the intercession of the Holy Virgin, leaving only that of which we are about to speak in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

ST. JOSEPH DISCOVERS THAT MARY IS ABOUT TO BECOME A MOTHER, WITHOUT BEING ABLE TO PENETRATE THE MYSTERY. HE ENDURES GREAT SUFFERINGS ON THIS ACCOUNT.

IT was about five months since the eternal Word had become incarnate in the chaste bosom of the Virgin Mary, when St. Joseph began to observe indications of it, and to entertain suspicions. It was the more apparent, because the proportions of her pure form were so perfect, that the least change was perceptible. Deeply concerned and anxious, St. Joseph, as he one day observed her coming forth from her oratory, perceived that it was no longer possible to doubt the testimony of his own eyes. The heart of the man of God was penetrated with profound sorrow, and he was unable to resist the harrowing reflections that tormented his spirit.

It may not be without utility or interest to notice some of these reflections, which increased the violence of his great affliction. In the first

place, he entertained a most chaste and sincere love for his faithful spouse, to whom, since the commencement of their union, he had devoted all the tenderness of his heart. Besides, his desire to serve her was augmented from day to day by the unequalled holiness and attractive manners of our blessed Lady. Our saint, therefore, was impelled, by a desire natural to his love, to find a response to it on her part. The Lord so ordered it, that, from this same desire, the holy Joseph was still more careful to serve and respect our blessed Mistress.

Thus St. Joseph fulfilled with great zeal his obligations as a most faithful husband and guardian of the mystery which, as yet, was hidden from him. But the more assiduous he was to serve, to honor his spouse while bearing for her a love, so pure, chaste, holy, and just, the more eager was his desire that she should reciprocate his affection. Nevertheless he did not disclose this internal conflict; either because of the respect produced by the humble majesty of his spouse, or because in witnessing the discreet deportment of Mary—her sweet converse, and her more than angelic purity—the revelation would have been too painful.

At the view of what was become so evident, he was lost in amazement. Still, though con-

vinced, he would not allow his imagination to go beyond appearances. Being a just and holy man, and seeing the fact, he suspended his judgment without entering into the cause. What an example for us ! It is most probable that if he had been convinced of the culpability of his wife, the violence of his grief would have put an end to his existence. In the second place, his reflections reminded him that he had had no agency in this condition which was but too apparent. Dishonor was inevitable when it should become known ; and, as St. Joseph was of a generous and noble heart, this apprehension gave him great pain. Besides, he considered, with rare prudence, the affliction that their own infamy would bring upon them if the matter came to be divulged.

But that which caused the greatest grief of all to the holy spouse, was the fear that his wife would be stoned, according to the law which ordered this punishment ; for he could not make himself an accomplice to hide the crime, if it existed. All these considerations pierced the heart of St. Joseph with the deepest grief, in which he found no consolation except in the irreproachable conduct of his spouse. Still, on the other hand, though appearances convinced him, he could neither find means of excuse, nor even

dare to communicate the subject of his grief to any human being. Our saint was then like one environed by the sorrows of death, and he felt the force of the words "*Jealousy is as cruel as hell.*"

He would have sought some alleviation for his pains in spiritual consolation, but grief suspended the powers of his soul. If his reason inclined to follow the suspicions suggested by his senses, the reflections that he made on the tried holiness of his most wise and prudent spouse caused them to vanish like ice in the heat of the sun, or smoke before the wind. If he strove to check the affections of his chaste love, it was impossible, since he found his spouse always more worthy of being loved. And although the truth was concealed from him, she had more power to attract, than the seeming deception of her infidelity to repel him. The sacred ties of love could not be rent asunder, because they reposed on the solid foundations of truth, reason, and justice.

Our saint did not then judge it expedient to declare his grief to his blessed spouse : added to this, the gravity, ever equal and divinely humble, which he saw in her, did not permit him to take this liberty ; for, although he saw marks so unequivocal, a conduct so pure and holy as hers could ill accord with infidelity.

Such a fault could not in any manner be compatible with so much purity, holiness and discretion; nor with that assemblage of graces whose growth was each day more visible in the august Mary.

In these perplexities the saintly husband addressed himself to God in prayer. Placing himself in His presence, "Eternal God and my Lord," he said, "my desires and my groanings are not hidden from Thy divine Majesty. I find myself struggling with violent agitations, I have given my heart to the spouse which I received from Thy hands, I have trusted in her purity, but the strange appearances which I discover in her cast me into the most afflicting perplexity. It would be rash to think that she had been unfaithful and had offended Thee, seeing in her such great purity and so eminent a holiness. It is, nevertheless, impossible to deny the evidence of my senses, and sorrow must destroy me unless there be here some mystery that I have not discovered. Reason exculpates, but the senses condemn her. I see plainly that she conceals from me the cause of her condition. What shall I do? I suspend my judgment, ignorant of the cause of what I see. Receive, O God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, my sighs and my tears, as an acceptable sacrifice. I cannot believe

that Mary has offended Thee; but, also, being her husband, I cannot presume the existence of any mystery of which I can be unworthy."

Saint Joseph persevered in his supplications and united with them many other affections and prayers. He thought there must be in all this some mystery, but his humility hindered him from being assured on this point. All the reasons that presented themselves in favor of the holiness of our most sweet Lady, contributed only to persuade him that she had committed no fault. At the same time the saint never thought of her being the mother of the Messiah, for he could not have believed himself worthy to be her spouse.

Sometimes he suspended his suspicions, at others appearances augmented them. Sometimes he was overwhelmed by agitation; sometimes in an aching calm, without power to resolve or to believe any thing. He could neither vanquish his doubts nor appease his heart, nor find that certitude of which he had so much need, to regulate his conduct and to calm his mind. And thus it was that the sufferings of the Holy Patriarch were so cruel. They serve as evident proofs of his incomparable prudence and sanctity, and they gained him such merits before God as to render him worthy of the favors he was about to receive.

Through the knowledge and infused light which she possessed, our blessed Lady saw all that passed in the breast of St. Joseph. But, though filled with tenderness and compassion for the sufferings of her spouse, she spoke not on the subject of his pain, but contented herself to serve him with submission and exactitude, because it was not proper to disclose the secret of the great King, without an express command from the Lord.

During this period, while he was in ignorance of the mystery of his spouse, St. Joseph thought it his duty to maintain his superiority, yet with great moderation. In this he imitated the ancient Patriarchs, from whom he would not degenerate, whose wives were very submissive. Although just and good, he therefore allowed himself to be served and honored by the blessed Virgin after their espousals, preserving in all things his authority as chief, which he sweetened by his rare humility and great prudence. And he would have had cause for this if our Lady had been like other women. On her part, the august Mary was most submissive and obedient to her husband, and, although she was above all, none ever equalled her in these. She served her spouse with an incomparable respect and promptitude, and thus she gave oppor

tunities to our saint, while she served him at the table, or occupied herself in other domestic affairs, to observe her closely, and, to the great affliction of his soul, assure himself more positively of the truth. It was impossible that in her actions the signs of her condition should not be more evident, but this did not hinder her in her tasks. She desired neither to excuse nor to justify herself, because this would not have accorded with the truth, nor with her angelical candor, nor with the grandeur and generosity of her most noble heart; and the pains of St. Joseph found no alleviation. The queen of heaven could easily have alleged the truth of her irreproachable innocence—have exculpated herself, and relieved St. Joseph of his pain by disclosing the mystery, but she would not hazard the justification of so mysterious a truth upon her own testimony, and, with great wisdom, she abandoned herself to the Divine Providence. She strove to console and please him in all things, often asking what he would have her to do. Many times she served him on her knees, and although these loving ways might in some sort console the saintly spouse, they gave him, also, additional causes of affliction in considering the many motives to love and esteem her who plunged him in such perplexity.

St. Joseph could not entirely conceal his grief: thus he often found himself pensive, sad, and in reverie. Pre-occupied by his sorrows, he sometimes spoke to his spouse with more harshness than formerly. But this was neither from indignation nor vengeance, for he had no such thought—it was merely the effect inseparable from a wounded heart. Our most prudent Lady, on her part, changed nothing in her sweet manners; on the contrary, she took greater pains than ever to comfort her spouse. She served him at table, or offered him a seat. Without doubt, this painful season was one of those which most exercised not only St. Joseph but our blessed Lady. Our incomparable queen offered continual supplications for her spouse to the Most High, that He would vouchsafe to regard and console him. In order better to understand the profound humility and the sublime wisdom of the august Mary in these circumstances, it should be understood that the Lord had not commanded her to keep the secret of the mystery of the incarnation. He did not even disclose His will on this point with as much clearness as in other matters. It seemed that the Lord left all to the wisdom and to the divine virtues of His Elected one.

Thus the divine Providence gave occasion to

the most pure Mary, and to her most faithful spouse, to exercise by heroic actions, each according to their capacity, the virtues and gifts which He had allotted them. He was pleased, thus to say, to witness the faith, the hope, the love, the humility of these upright hearts in the midst of so poignant an affliction. The Lord seemed deaf, according to our manner of speaking, for His greater glory, in order to give to the world this example of sanctity and prudence. He waited until the proper time to speak was come. Let us understand from this the designs of God and His secret ways with the souls whom He cherishes, and whom He would render capable to receive His favors and His gifts. We ought to use every effort, and employ all our care to acquire efficaciously a true resignation to this divine Providence. If men only knew the loving care of this Father of mercy, they would be happy to forget themselves, and cease to plunge into cares at once burdensome, useless, and dangerous. It is of the utmost importance to the creature to let himself be guided by the hand of the Lord, because men are ignorant of His operations, and the ends to which they are to be led by them.

If God were susceptible of being touched like men, by pain or jealousy, He would suffer, in

perceiving that His own creatures desire to seek the least thing in any other than himself. The Lord regards the actions of men; He corrects their faults with love; He foresees their desires; He protects them in danger; He fortifies them in their trials; He assists them in afflictions. None can resist Him, or hinder His will. He executes what He can; He can execute all that He wills, and He will give himself entirely to the just who is in His grace and confides in Him alone. Who can conceive the greatness and the nature of the gifts which He pours into hearts disposed to receive them!

Let us leave all to His providence, for the Most High will give us whatever is most sure and necessary for our salvation. Except the pains which the august Mary endured from those which were suffered by her most Holy Son, the most severe of all her life were caused by the afflictions and perplexities of St. Joseph in the circumstances which we have just related.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUSPICIONS OF ST. JOSEPH INCREASE, AND HE RESOLVES TO LEAVE HIS SPOUSE—THE ANGEL OF THE LORD DECLARES TO HIM THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

ST. JOSEPH endeavored to calm the painful agitations of his heart by doing his utmost to remove the conviction of his mind respecting the condition of his wife. But the indications which became every day more visible in her holy person served only to confirm it. The further our Lady advanced, the more amiable, vigorous, active and beautiful she became; and her invincible charms attracted his chaste love, without entirely allaying these conflicting passions. At length all hesitation was at an end, he could no longer entertain a doubt of the evidence. His heart was conformed to the will of God; nevertheless, through the weakness of the flesh, his spirit was exceedingly sorrowful, and nothing remained to dissipate his sadness. He felt his bodily strength diminish—and, al-

though no particular malady manifested itself, he grew thin, and his countenance bore the marks of deep affliction. And as he preserved silence, not seeking consolation elsewhere, (as men usually do,) the sufferings of the saint were naturally more intense.

The heart of the gentle Mary was penetrated by a sorrow not less profound; but she resolved to redouble her cares for the health of her spouse. She continued to conceal the mystery which she had no command to disclose, in order to honor and to preserve the secret of the celestial King. So far as regarded herself, she left nothing undone to promote his comfort—entreating him to remind her of any thing which might contribute to restore his declining health. She besought him to repose himself, and to partake of some little refreshment; for it was but right to supply the wants of the body, in order to obtain strength to labor for the Lord.

St. Joseph, attentive to every movement of his spouse, and sensible of the holy effects of her conversation and presence, said within himself: "Is it possible that a woman so holy, in whom the grace of God is so perceptible, can cast me into such perplexity? What can I find to equal her, if I leave her? Where find consolation, if she fail me? But all these

trouble me even less than the infamy that may result from this unhappy affair; or that I should give cause to believe that I have been the accomplice of a crime. If I make myself the author of her condition, it will be a falsehood unworthy of an honorable man, and opposed to my conscience and my reputation. In such a state of embarrassment what shall I do? The least evil that can happen is to absent myself—to leave the house."

Our blessed Lady, being sincerely afflicted by the resolution which her spouse had just taken, addressed herself to the angels of her guard, "You," she said, "who obey with promptitude all the commands of the Lord, listen now to my prayers. Prevent my spouse, I conjure you, from executing this intention which he has made to absent himself from me." The angels obeyed their queen, and silently conveyed many holy inspirations to the heart of St. Joseph. They persuaded him anew of the sanctity and perfection of his spouse—that God was incomprehensible in His works, and impenetrable in His judgments, and that He was most faithful to those who trust in Him.

The agitated spirit of St. Joseph was somewhat soothed by these inspirations, although he knew not from whence they came, nor by what

order he received them. Yet as the cause of his grief remained, he always sank again into sadness, and returned to his first resolution to desert his spouse. Then our blessed Lady addressed herself directly to her Son whom she bore in her virginal bosom. "It would not be becoming," said she, "that thy servant should be without a husband who assists and shelters her from calumnies: do not permit him to execute his design to abandon me." The Most High replied: "I will speedily console my servant Joseph, and after I shall have declared to him, through my angel, the mystery of which he is ignorant, you may speak with him concerning it. I will fill him with my spirit, and enable him to accomplish all that he should do in these mysteries. He shall aid and assist you under all circumstances."

The august Mary comprehended how important it was that St. Joseph should have to endure this affliction, by which his spirit was exercised and prepared for the great charge that was to be confided to him. He had now passed two months of suffering, and, overcome by his apprehensions, he exclaimed: "I find no remedy for my grief but absence. I acknowledge that my spouse is perfect, but it is not possible for me to penetrate the mystery of her condition,

and I will not insult her virtue by subjecting her to the penalties of the law. I will depart forthwith." The saint resolved to set out during the night. He therefore prepared a small packet of clothing. Having received a trifling sum of money which was due to him for work, he determined to leave the house after midnight. But as he was accustomed to meditate, he reflected on the importance of the undertaking. "Great God," he exclaimed, "of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the sorrow which breaks my heart is not hidden from Thy divine clemency. Thou knowest, besides, O Lord, (though in other things I am not free from sin,) my innocence touching the subject of my grief. I choose the lesser evil in quitting my spouse, and go to end my days in some desert, there to abandon myself entirely to the care of Thy providence. Forsake me not, for I desire only what is for Thy glory."

St. Joseph prostrated himself, and made a vow to offer at the temple of Jerusalem a part of the small sum which he had reserved for his journey, praying the Lord to defend his spouse from calumny, and preserve her from all evil. Such was the great rectitude of this man of God, and such the esteem which he preserved for our blessed Lady. After this prayer, he took a little repose, intending to depart without seeing

her. Our blessed Lady, from her oratory, observed all that St. Joseph did, or proposed to do; for the Most High revealed it to her.

The Divine Majesty permitted that the Blessed Virgin and her holy spouse should endure these interior sufferings, in order that, besides the merits which so long a martyrdom would procure for them, the succor of the divine consolations should be to them more admirable and more remarkable. The august Mary practised many virtues during this period, whereby she teaches us to hope for relief from the Most High in the greatest afflictions. And what an example is not that of St. Joseph! No one had ever stronger grounds of suspicion, nor more of discretion to control his judgment than he.

The passion of jealousy produces sharp wounds in him who is attacked by it, and no one ever felt its effects so sensibly as St. Joseph, though, in fact, there was no foundation for it, if he had but known the truth. He was endowed with a singular intelligence to penetrate the sanctity and the lovely character of his spouse. But this, in augmenting his esteem for her whom he was about to lose, augmented his sorrow to find himself necessitated to abandon her.

St. Joseph was not subject to the disorders of common jealousy, in which the passions of con-

cupiscence are engaged, which neither reason nor prudence can vanquish. The jealousy of the saint arose only from the depth of his love and a conditional suspicion, viz.: whether his chaste spouse reciprocated his affection; for a pledge so dear as the affection of a wife must not be shared by any other. When love is so well founded, the chains that cement it are very strong, and the more so because there are fewer imperfections to weaken them. There was nothing in our sweet Lady which could diminish the love of her spouse. On the contrary, all that she had received from grace and from nature gave him new subjects every day to strengther his affection.

After the saint had offered the prayer, of which we have already made mention, he fell asleep in this sadness, which had sunk into dejection. He was sure that he should awake in time to depart at midnight, without being seen, as he thought, by his spouse. Our Lady, on her part, awaited the remedy, and earnestly sought it by her humble prayers. She was consoled by her assurance that the pains of her spouse had now reached their highest degree—the hour of mercy and consolation for that sorrowing heart could not long tarry, and her desires would soon be accomplished. And now the

Lord sent the archangel Gabriel, to disclose, by a divine revelation to St. Joseph while he slept, the mystery which was to be accomplished in his spouse. The archangel acquitted himself of this embassy, appeared in a dream, as related by St. Matthew, and declared to him, in the terms quoted by that evangelist, the whole mystery of the incarnation and redemption.

There are various reasons why the archangel spoke to St. Joseph in a dream, and not in his waking hours, although the mystery had been manifested to others when awake. In the first place, St. Joseph was so prudent and so filled with esteem for the blessed Virgin, that stronger proofs were unnecessary to convince him of the dignity of Mary, and of the mystery of the incarnation; for the divine inspiration penetrates easily into well-disposed hearts. In the second place, his trouble had begun with his senses, and it was but just that they should be mortified and deprived of the angelic vision, since they had permitted the entrance of illusions and suspicions; therefore the truth ought not to enter by their means. The third reason is, that although St. Joseph committed no sin in these circumstances, yet his senses had undoubtedly contracted a species of stain, and it was not proper that the angel should fulfil his embassy at a

time when these senses, which had been scandalized, were interdicted by the suspension of their operations. Besides these, there was the reason which should overrule all others, that such was the will of the Lord, who is just and holy, and perfect in all His works.

St. Joseph saw not the angel through any image or form—he heard only the internal voice, and understood the mystery. He heard what St. Gabriel said, "that he should not fear to remain with Mary his wife, because her condition was the work of the Holy Ghost. That she should bring forth a son, whom he should call Jesus; that He should deliver His people from their sins; and that in this mystery would be accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah—'A Virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, who shall be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us.'" We perceive from the words of the celestial ambassador, that the saint had separated from the pure Mary in intention, since he was commanded to receive her without fear.

St. Joseph awoke, informed of the mystery which had been revealed to him, and instructed that his spouse was the Mother of God. He found himself divided between the joy of his happiness, and his unhoped for dignity, and sor-

row for what he had been about to do. He prostrated himself instantly on the ground, and made, with humble fear and inconceivable contentment, heroic acts of humility and gratitude. He gave thanks to God for the mystery which had been disclosed to him, and for having made him the spouse of her whom He had chosen to be His mother—him, who did not deserve to be her servant. The doubts and uncertainty which St. Joseph had suffered, laid in him the foundations of the most profound humility, necessary for him to whom was confided the dispensation of the most holy counsels of the Lord. The remembrance of what had passed served as a lesson for his future life.

Having rendered thanks to the divine Majesty, the holy man began to reproach himself. "O my divine spouse," said he, "most sweet dove, chosen by the Most High to be His own mother, how hast thy unworthy servant dared to call in question thy fidelity! How could he, who is only dust and ashes, suffer her who is Queen of Heaven o serve him? Why have I not kissed the earth thy steps have trod, and served thee kneeling? How shall I dare to raise my eyes in thy presence, or open my lips to speak with thee! Lord, give me grace, grant me strength to pray for pardon! Inspire her to show me

mercy, so that she will not reject her unworthy servant as he deserves. Alas! how clearly she must have penetrated all my thoughts: how can I have the boldness to appear in her presence? I see now the grossness of my conduct, and my stupid mistake; and if Thy justice for my chastisement had permitted me to execute my imprudent intention, what would not be now my wretchedness! Thanks to Thee, my God, throughout eternity, for so great a blessing. I will present myself to my Princess, my spouse, confiding in the sweetness of her clemency, and, prostrate at her feet, I will beseech her pardon, so that for her sake, Lord, Thou wilt regard me with pity, and pardon my fault."

Saint Joseph went forth from his humble chamber very unlike what he was before his recent slumber. Now he was happy; yet he dared not disturb our blessed Lady, who was still employed in the sweets of her contemplation. While awaiting the favorable moment, the man of God with tearful eyes unbound the little packet that he had prepared—but with sentiments far different from those which had previously occupied him. Having learned the honor due to our blessed Lady, our saint watered the house with his tears; he swept it and prepared other little household work, which,

while ignorant of her dignity, he had intrusted to the care of his blessed spouse.

He now resolved to change his deportment towards her, by appropriating to himself the office of servant, reserving that of mistress for her majesty. Further on we shall relate the loving disputes which he had with our queen to decide which of the two should serve and take the humbler place. At the proper time the saint presented himself at the chamber of our blessed Lady, who awaited his coming with the sweetness and complacency which we shall recount in the following chapter. Let us take an example from St. Joseph, who believed, without delay and without doubting, that which the angel revealed to him, in such wise that he merited to be elevated to a great recompense, and to a sublime dignity. And if he abased himself with so much humility, not having committed any sin in what he did, but only in having been greatly troubled under circumstances which seemed to give so much occasion for anxiety, consider how much we ought to humiliate ourselves—we who are nothing but miserable worms of the dust—by weeping over our negligences and our sins, so that the Most High may regard us as father and spouse.

CHAPTER V.

ST. JOSEPH ASKS PARDON OF THE HOLY MARY HIS SPOUSE—HE RESOLVES TO SERVE HER IN ALL THINGS WITH PROFOUND RESPECT

ST. JOSEPH, after the discovery of his error, waited until our blessed Lady should come forth from her retreat. As soon as he thought it was time, he opened the door of the little chamber occupied by the mother of the heavenly King, and, throwing himself at her feet, he exclaimed, with humility and profound veneration, "My spouse, Mother of the Eternal Word, behold your servant prostrate before you. By the same Lord whom you bear in your most chaste bosom, I pray you to pardon my presumption. Sure I am that none of my thoughts can be hidden from your wisdom, nor from the divine light which you have received. Great was my blindness to think of deserting you; but you know that I did it in ignorance, because neither the secret of the great King had been revealed

to me, nor the greatness of your dignity. Forget, I entreat you, the many deficiencies of a vile creature who offers his heart and his life in your service; I will not rise from your feet until you have pardoned my folly—until I shall have received your forgiveness and your benediction."

The august Mary listened with mingled feelings to the humble words of her spouse. She rejoiced in the Lord to learn that St. Joseph was informed of the mysteries of the incarnation, and that he revered them with such profound faith and humility. But she was troubled by the resolution he had taken to change his conduct towards her, and with the respect and submission with which he addressed her. Knowing how much she ought to esteem humility, she was disturbed by the apprehension that St. Joseph, recognizing in her the mother of the Lord, would deport himself in all things as her inferior. Insisting that he should rise, she prostrated herself at his feet, although he made every effort to hinder this, but it was not possible; for in humility she was invincible. Then she said to the saint: "It is I, my spouse, who ought to beseech your pardon for the pain and sorrow that you have had to endure on my account, therefore I beg you will forget them."

Our blessed Lady, for the consolation of her

nd, continued: "I could not reveal to you the hidden mystery which the Most High had enclosed within me, because it was my duty to await the expression of the will of the Lord. Thus my silence should not be considered as arising from any want of esteem for you, for in all things I regard you as my master and my husband. I am, and I always shall be, your faithful servant; but do not make any change in the demeanor which you have always preserved towards me. The Lord has not elevated me to the dignity of being His own mother to be served, but to be the servant of all, and of you especially. This is my office: it is but just that you should leave it to me, since the Most High has so ordained in giving me your protection.

St. Joseph, by these reasons and many others which were of a sweet efficacy, found his spirit enlightened in a singular manner. He received, through this purest of creatures, extraordinary divine influences, and, entirely renewed in heart, ne replied: "You are blessed among women; you are blessed among all nations. May the creator of heaven and earth be glorified by eternal praises, for that He has chosen you for His dwelling. In you alone He has accomplished the promises that He made to our fathers and to

the prophets. Let all generations bless Him that He has not exalted himself in any creature as in you, and that, being the vilest of men, He has chosen me to be your servant." The saint was enlightened by the divine Spirit after the manner of St. Elizabeth; but the light and knowledge which St. Joseph received were, in a certain sense, more admirable, because of his dignity and ministry.

The august Mary replied by the Magnificat and other new canticles; and while chanting them, inflamed by the divine fire, she was rapt in a sublime ecstasy, and, lifted up from the earth in a globe of brilliant light which encircled her, she was transformed as in a glory. St. Joseph was filled with admiration and joy inconceivable at this view of his holy spouse, for he had never yet seen her surrounded with such glory and excellence. She appeared to him quite transparent, and, at the same time, he discovered the integrity and virginal purity of our queen and the mystery of her dignity. He saw, also, and recognized in the chaste bosom of Mary the holy humanity of the Infant God and the union of the two natures in the person of the Word. He adored the Infant God with a profound humility, acknowledged his true Redeemer, and offered himself to His service with fervent acts of divine love.

The Lord regarded him with great favor, and distinguished him among all men, for He accepted him as His reputed father and gave him the title. And to render him conformable to this new and honorable name, He imparted to him all the knowledge and divine gifts to which Christian purity can or ought to aspire.

If it were a proof of the magnanimity of the glorious St. Joseph that he did not die of jealousy, it is also a subject of admiration that he was not overwhelmed by the joy which he felt on this occasion. In the first case his holiness appears, but in the second he received such augmentations of graces and gifts from the Lord, that, if His divine Majesty had not dilated his heart, he could not have been able to receive them. He was entirely renewed and enlightened so as to converse worthily with her who was the Mother of God, and, conjointly with her, to dispense all that concerned the incarnation and the charge of the Word made man. It was also manifested to him, in order that he should recognize the obligation imposed on him to serve his holy spouse, that all the gifts he had received from the Most High were received through her and for her. He knew that the gifts he had received before his espousals were bestowed because the Lord had chosen him for this office, and that

those which he now received were because she had merited them for him. And as our blessed Lady had been the instrument by which the Lord had wrought the sanctification of John the Baptist, and his mother, St. Elizabeth, she was the organ, also, by whom St. Joseph received the plenitude of grace. This most happy spouse knew all this, and he responded to it like a faithful and grateful servant.

The holy evangelists made no mention of these great mysteries, nor of many others which were known to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, because, for many reasons, they were not suitable to be made known to the Gentiles on their first conversion. These things were reserved, by the impenetrable judgments of Providence, for times which the divine wisdom judged more suitable,* or when the Church should have need of the intercession and support of our holy Queen. The faithful St. Joseph, after having been made aware of the dignity of his spouse, and the mystery of the incarnation, conceived so lofty an esteem for her, that, although he had been always pure and perfect in his life, he now became as a new man. He resolved henceforth to change his conduct, and to redouble his ven-

* Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now."—*St. John*, xvi. 12.

eration towards our blessed Lady This was in comformity with the wisdom of the saint, and due to the excellence of his spouse, for he was servant, and she mistress of the universe. St. Joseph knew all this by divine illumination. Now, to satisfy the desire he had to honor her in whom he recognized the Mother of God, when he spoke to her, or passed before her, if alone together, he bent the knee. He would not suffer her to wait on him, nor that she should occupy herself in other humble offices, such as sweeping the house, cleansing the vessels, and many other things which he thought derogatory from the dignity of our queen.

But our saintly Lady, who was the humblest of the humble, and whose humility was not to be overcome, prayed St. Joseph not to pay her such honors as to bow the knee to her. This veneration, she said, was doubtless due to the Lord, whom she bore in her bosom; but while He remained there, the person of Christ could not be distinguished from her own. The saint, yielding to her humble desires, rendered this worship to the Lord, who was in the bosom of Mary, and to her as His mother, only when unperceived by her.

They had also humble disputes respecting their servile employments. St. Joseph could

not consent to allow our amiable Mistress to perform them, and strove to prevent it. On her part, she did what she could, but while she was retired in her oratory the saint found time to do many things, and thus our sweet Lady was frustrated in her desires to be the servant. At these times she addressed her meek complaints to the Lord, and prayed him to oblige her spouse not to hinder her in the exercise of humility.

This virtue is so agreeable at the tribunal of God, that we ask for no common grace when we pray for it; for humility imparts a certain greatness to all things, and inclines God to clemency. The Divine Majesty hearkened to the request of our blessed Lady, and his guardian angel said, interiorly, to the blessed St. Joseph, "Do not frustrate the humble desires of her who is above all creatures in heaven or on earth. Permit her to serve you in external things, and preserve for her in your interior the greatest reverence. Render to the Word made man, in all times and in all places, the homage that is due to Him. You can, meanwhile, assist his Mother, and honor always the Lord of the universe who is within her."

Having received these orders from the Most High, St. Joseph no longer refused her humble exercises to our sweet Lady. Thus both offered

to God the sacrifice of their will. The most pure Mary, in practising her profound humility, and faithful obedience to her spouse; and St. Joseph, by obedience to the Most High, with a holy confusion to see himself served by her whom he recognized as mistress of the universe and mother of the Creator.

Thus our saint was compensated for the humility which he could not exercise; for to see himself served as he was humiliated him far more, and obliged him to abase himself still more profoundly in contempt of himself. In these dispositions St. Joseph meditated upon the Lord, whom the august Mary bore in her chaste bosom, adoring and rendering to Him honor and glory. Then, in recompense for his sanctity and his respect, mingled with fear, the Infant God, made man, sometimes manifested himself in an admirable manner. He saw Him in the bosom of His most pure Mother, as through a luminous crystal. Afterwards, our incomparable Lady conversed more familiarly with her blessed spouse upon the mysteries of the incarnation, for she knew that he was now informed of the secrets of the hypostatic union of the two natures, divine and human, within her virginal bosom.

No tongue can relate the celestial discourses that were held between the blessed Virgin and

St. Joseph. And who can describe the effects produced on the gentle and pious heart of this holy man, on finding himself the spouse of her who was the veritable mother of his Creator, and to see her performing for him the duties of a simple servant?

If the Almighty enriched the house and the person of Obed-Edom with such plenteous benedictions for having received the ark of the Old Testament, what benedictions would He not bestow upon St. Joseph, to whom He had confided the true ark, and the Legislator himself who was enclosed within it?

The happiness and the fidelity of this saint were incomparable, not only because the living Ark of the New Testament abode in his house, but because he guarded it like a faithful and prudent servant. The Lord placed him over His family, also, that he should provide for it according to its necessities as a faithful administrator. Let all nations acknowledge him, bless him, and publish his praises, since the Most High has never done for any other what He has done for this incomparable saint. In view of mysteries so august, I will glorify this adorable Lord, and confess Him as holy, just, merciful, wise and admirable in all His wondrous works.

CHAPTER VI

MODE OF LIFE OF THE AUGUST MARY AND ST. JOSEPH.—CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THEM AND OTHER REMARKABLE CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE humble house of Joseph, which our saints made their dwelling-place, consisted of three chambers only. St. Joseph slept in one of these, and used another as a workshop, where the tools were deposited which served for use in his trade of carpenter. The third, which contained a small bed, the work of our saint, was appropriated to the Queen of Heaven, who slept there, and made it her ordinary abode. This order was established from the date of their marriage.

Before he was informed of her dignity, the saintly husband rarely, except when some affair obliged him to ask her advice, visited his wife, because he was engaged with his work, and she remained in her retreat. But after his happiness was made known to him, the holy man became more assiduous, and went very often to

seek our blessed Lady, to renew the offer of his services. Yet he never approached her but with great humility and reverent respect. Before speaking to her he was careful to observe how she was occupied. Thus, many times he saw her rapt in ecstasy, and inclosed within a radiant light; at others, he found her discoursing with angels. Often she was prostrate, in the form of a cross, and speaking with the Lord. In these circumstances our saint contented himself with the liberty of gazing upon her with the most profound reverence. It was granted to his merits to hear the harmony of the angelic chants, and to inhale a delicious fragrance that strengthened him and filled his whole being with spiritual joy and consolation.

The holy spouses were alone in their house, for they kept no servant—not only because of their great humility, but also that they found it most convenient to have no witnesses of the prodigies that were of such frequent occurrence with them.

Our Lady never left the house, unless obliged by some pressing circumstance; but a woman, their neighbor and relative, she who had served St. Joseph during the sojourn of the Blessed Virgin at the house of Zachariah, took charge of their external affairs. She was abundantly

recompensed for these services, not only in her own advancement in perfection, but her family also felt the beneficent effects of the protection of the holy family. The august Mary many times healed their maladies, and filled them with heavenly benedictions.

Their nourishment was very frugal; but they partook of it every day, and together. St. Joseph sometimes ate flesh meat, but the holy Virgin never, although she prepared it for her spouse. Their ordinary diet consisted of fruits, fish, bread, and cooked vegetables. But this was always taken with great moderation, and only so much as was needful, but the quality varied according to circumstances.

St. Joseph never saw his holy spouse asleep. He did not know, from his own experience, whether she slept at all. Her place of rest was the little bed made by the saint. It had two coverings, between which she was accustomed to place herself to take a brief and light repose. The under garment of the august Mary was a tunic or chemise, but little softer than woolen stuff. She never left it off, except when it was worn, nor soiled it, and no one in the world saw it, not even St. Joseph. In all her works, and in whatever she did for St. Joseph, the greatest cleanliness was observed.

Before St. Joseph was informed of the mystery of the Incarnation, our blessed Lady, at certain times when he was not occupied, used to read to him from the Holy Scriptures, particularly from David and the Prophets. She explained them like an experienced instructress, and her holy spouse questioned her on many points, her replies to which gave him such cause for admiration, that both united in praising and blessing the Lord. But after the saint had discovered the grand secret, our Lady addressed him as the elected of God, to be the coadjutor of the works and mysteries of the Redemption. They discoursed then openly together, and with a more clear understanding, of the prophecies which referred to the conception of the Word by a Virgin Mother, His birth, and His most holy life.

Our august Lady explained all; and then they spoke of what they should do when the day, so much desired, should come—when the Child should be born, when He would be in her arms, and she should nourish Him from her virginal breast, and when, alone among mortals, her holy spouse would be the only one who would participate in this inconceivable happiness! But she said little of the death and the

passion, for she was unwilling to afflict the tender heart of her spouse.

The faithful and happy St. Joseph was all enkindled by divine love in these gracious conversations, and, shedding tears of joy, he cried out: "Is it indeed possible that I shall see my God and Redeemer within your chaste arms?—that I shall adore Him there?—that I shall hear His sweet voice?—that I shall touch Him?—that my eyes shall see His divine face?—that the sweat of my brow shall be employed in His service, and for His support?—that we shall speak and converse with Him? Whence comes to me such bliss as none could ever have deserved? Why have I not rich treasures, that I might lay them at His feet?"

Our august Lady replied: "The great God comes not into the world to find riches, for He needs them not; for them would He not descend from heaven. He comes on earth only to repair the disorders of the world, and by sure ways to conduct it to eternal life; and these ways are none other than humility and poverty. For this He has chosen our poor habitation. He wills not that we be rich in worldly goods, which are but vanity and vexation of spirit."

The saint often besought the holy Virgin to instruct him in the character of the virtues,

especially that of the divine love, in order that he might understand how to conduct himself in a suitable manner towards the God-man, so as not to be rejected as an unprofitable servant. The Mistress of the Virtues condescended to his request, and explained to her spouse the properties of the virtues, and the manner of practising them with all possible perfection. Nevertheless she deported herself in these instructions with such great discretion, that she appeared in no wise the mistress of her spouse, for she interrogated the saint and instructed him by her questions.

They mingled these conversations, or readings from the Scriptures, sometimes with manual labor, when the saint was obliged to continue at his work. Our most amiable Lady added to them the consolations of the celestial doctrines; and thus the happy husband made greater advancement in virtue than with the work of his hands. She showed to Him the great fruit that may be drawn from labor. Believing herself unworthy to be maintained by her spouse, she was humbled, in thinking how much she was indebted to him. She felt herself as much obliged as if she had been the most useless of creatures, and, being unable to assist our saint, she served him whenever it was possible. About

this time St. Joseph saw, one day, a great number of birds come to recreate the queen of creatures. They fluttered around her, as if to form a choir, and sang with a delicious melody. St. Joseph had not before witnessed this marvel, and, overflowing with joy and wonder, he exclaimed: "Is it possible that unreasoning creatures acquit themselves of their obligations better than I? It is just that if they recognize, serve, and honor you, so far as they are capable, that you should permit me also, to acquit myself of what is justly your right." But the most prudent Virgin replied: "I am but a simple creature, yet I ought to induce all creatures to praise the Most High."

It often happened that they found themselves in want of necessaries, for they were very liberal to the poor, nor were they careful, like worldly people, to provide for their wants in advance. Now the Lord so ordered it, that the faith and patience of His holy Mother and St. Joseph should not be idle. These privations were an inexpressible consolation to the august Mary, not only because of her love of poverty, but also of her humility, through which she considered herself undeserving of the necessary aliments of life. She prayed the Most High only to supply the wants of St. Joseph.

The All-Powerful forgot not His poor, and,

while giving them occasion to augment their merits and to exercise their virtues, He gave them also food in season. Sometimes He inspired their neighbors or acquaintances to assist them by a gift. Oftener St. Elizabeth sent them succors from her own house; for, since the visit of the Queen of Heaven, she had resolved to help them, and our sweet Lady sent in return some work of her own hands. Our Holy Mistress sometimes exercised the power with which she was endowed over creatures, and the birds brought fruits or bread. Her happy spouse was frequently a witness of these events.

They were also sometimes assisted, in a wonderful manner, by the ministry of angels. But before recounting these, it is well to remark that the nobleness of heart, the faith, and the generosity of the saint were so exalted, that his soul was free from every taint of avarice, or sordid care for the future. And although the holy spouses devoted themselves to labor, they never demanded the price of their work, nor would they enter into bargains, for they did not labor from motives of interest, but to exercise charity towards those who had need of it, leaving the acknowledgment of it to their discretion.

When some payment was made to them, they received it not as a price or recompense, but as

an alms. It often happened that no recompense was offered for their work, and that they found themselves entirely destitute of food, and then the Lord provided it. One day, when their usual dinner hour was past, and no morsel of food was to be found in the house, they remained a long time in prayer and thanksgiving to the divine Majesty, for this affliction. During this time the holy angels prepared a repast. They arranged the table and placed thereon fruits, bread of a very delicate kind, fish, and a sort of conserve of wonderful sweetness and excellence; and then some of these blessed spirits went to call their Queen—others, St. Joseph. Each of them recognized the heavenly gifts, and, with holy tears of joy, renewed their thanksgivings to the Most High. At length they partook of the repast, which, being finished, they united in chanting praises, truly sublime, to the beneficent giver of every good gift. The august Mary and her spouse often experienced wonders of this character, for there were no witnesses from whom it was necessary they should be concealed. ℣ The Lord was very liberal towards them, whom He had appointed administrators of the most wonderful prodigies which had ever been wrought. It is necessary to remark, that when our blessed Lady composed canticles of praise, either alone, or with St.

Joseph or the angels, we are to understand that they were always new, like those composed by St. Hannah, mother of Samuel; Moses; Hezekiah, and other prophets. If they had been written, they would form a large volume, which would have been the admiration of the world.

The providence of the Most High declares himself Protector of the humble who confide in Him, because the Divine Majesty regards them with love. He is pleased with them—He bears them in His bosom—He is attentive to all their desires and all their pains. The august Mary and St. Joseph were very poor, and often found themselves in great want, but never did they allow the poison of avarice or cupidity to enter their hearts. They sought the glory of God alone, abandoning themselves entirely to His most loving care.

We ought to be content with what is necessary, and to be convinced that the providence of our Creator can never fail. If He be slow sometimes to send us His help, we should not be afflicted nor lose hope. He who has abundance ought not to fix his hopes upon it. We should attribute to God both abundance and poverty, and make a holy use of both. Let us practise this doctrine, and abandon ourselves to Providence, and nothing that is needful for us can ever be wanting.

CHAPTER VII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BIRTH OF THE INFANT JESUS —EDICT OF AUGUSTUS.—THE BLESSED MARY AND ST. JOSEPH GO TO BETHLEHEM.

THE Mother of the eternal Word, the holy Mary, seeing the period of the birth of the Infant God approach, would not undertake to make the necessary preparations for it, without the commands of her husband, and the will of God. Although she was able to decide for herself in whatever concerned the maternal office, she preferred to practice the duties of an obedient and most faithful servant. She therefore consulted her holy spouse, St. Joseph. "It is time," she said, "to begin the preparations for the birth of my most blessed Son. With your permission I will provide the swaddling clothes to receive Him. I have some linen, spun by myself, which will serve for a part, if you will seek for the finest and softest that can be found for the rest. And that all may be well done, let us offer a special prayer to His Divine

Majesty that we may do whatever is most agreeable to Him."

St. Joseph replied: "If it were necessary to give the purest of my blood to testify my readiness to render service to my God, and to do what you request, I should esteem myself happy to pour it out in the cruellest torments. Order all as it seems best, for I desire to obey you as your servant." While they were engaged in prayer, the Most High replied to each in particular by the same voice. "I have descended from heaven to earth to elevate humility, and to debase pride—to honor poverty, and to make riches contemptible. For this reason, it is my will that you treat me in the humanity which I have assumed, in all things exterior, as if I were the child of both of you—and interiorly you will recognize in me the Son of my eternal Father, and true God, with the veneration and love due to Me, being man and God at the same time."

The august Mary and St. Joseph were confirmed by this divine voice in the wisdom that should guide their actions in all the services which they were to render to the Infant God. They resolved to practise the most sublime and perfect mode of honoring their true God, and never among mere creatures was He so perfectly

honored. But before the eyes of the world they treated Him as if they were conjointly His parents, because it was the Lord's will that men should so believe. The celestial inhabitants were in admiration of the conduct of the holy spouses as we shall relate further on. They resolved also to devote to the Infant God all the services which their condition admitted, without attracting observation, so that the secret of the great King should be concealed; neither should he want for any thing, for, in ministering to Him, they could manifest their ardent love so far as it was possible.

St. Joseph, having received payment for some of his work, purchased, according to the wishes of his spouse, two pieces of cloth, one white, and the other nearer violet than gray—the best that could be found. Our lovely Lady made of them swaddling clothes for her most holy child. She made little shirts of the linen that she had spun during the early period of her marriage, with the intention of offering it at the temple. Happily her intention was changed; nevertheless she made an offering of what was left. The blessed Virgin had woven this linen on her knees, with tears of an inexpressible devotion. St. Joseph also purchased flowers and aromatics, from which the holy Mother com-

posed the most delicious perfume that ever was made. With this she sprinkled the swaddling clothes consecrated to the Victim, and, folding them, she placed them in a case which she and St. Joseph carried with them to Bethlehem, as we shall see.

It is hardly necessary to remark, that all these works recounted here ought not to be regarded simply as facts. Their objects, and the intentions which inspired them, redolent of sanctity, and enriched with the highest perfection, must be taken into view. The divine Mother, her heart all glowing with love, offered all the sacrifices which the ancient law contained in figure. She realized, in truth, the ancient figures, by the exercise of virtues and acts both interior and exterior. Her happy spouse, on his part, accompanied her in many of them.

If the smallest portion of grace that a creature, whoever he may be, receives, by means of a virtue that he has practised, is worth more than all the universe, who can estimate its greatness in her who surpassed the merits of the highest Seraphim? Our holy Lady saw the humanity united to the Divinity in the person of the Word, saw all the interior acts of the most holy soul of her divine Son, and the prayers that He offered for her, for St. Joseph, for all

the human race, and especially for the predestinate.

The Most High had determined, by His immutable will, that the only Son of the Father should be born at Bethlehem. The ancient prophets had long since announced it. The Lord disposed all things for the accomplishment of His divine decree; and it was by an edict of Cæsar Augustus, who commanded, as it is recorded by St. Luke, a census to be made of the whole world. It consisted in acknowledging the authority of the Emperor of Rome, and paying a certain tribute. To effect this, every one was obliged to inscribe himself on the register of his native city.

This edict being published at Nazareth, St. Joseph was informed of it. Returning home, in much trouble, he related to his blessed spouse what had happened. The most prudent Virgin replied: "The edict of an earthly potentate ought not to disturb you in this manner, since the Sovereign of heaven and earth takes care of all things that belong to us. His Providence will assist us. Let us abandon ourselves with confidence to His guidance."

The holy Virgin was instructed in all the mysteries of her divine Son, and she knew that He was to be born in Bethlehem, poor, and a

stranger; but she said nothing of this to St. Joseph. They conferred together upon what they ought to do, for the period of the birth of the Infant God approached. At length St. Joseph said to his spouse: "It seems to me that I cannot be dispensed from executing this edict of the emperor. And although it would suffice to go alone, I dare not leave you, for I should not have a moment of repose—my heart would be in perpetual alarm. It would be risking too much to propose to you to accompany me to Bethlehem; it would expose you, too evidently, to danger. This apprehension gives me great pain. Present, I entreat you, my supplications to the Most High, that He may not separate me from you."

The humble Mary obeyed the request of St. Joseph only to prove her obedience, for she was not ignorant of the Divine will. She therefore laid the desires of her faithful spouse before the Lord, who replied to her: "Obey my servant Joseph in what he has proposed and desires. Bear him company in this journey. I will be with you, for it is my will that you should go." The Lord ordered nine thousand angels to join the thousand who formed her guard.

Our blessed Lady confided to St. Joseph this response, and declared that it was the will of

the Most High that she should accompany him to Bethlehem. The saintly man was full of joy, and expressed his humble gratitude for this favor. He said to his spouse: "I have no other anxiety in this journey except the pain which it will cause to you. But I hope to find relations and friends who will receive us with kindness." The kind heart of the good man induced him to believe this, but the Lord had disposed otherwise. The saint was mistaken in his expectations, and suffered much from the disappointment.

Our sweet Lady forebore to reveal to St. Joseph what was already known to her touching the event to be accomplished. They appointed the day of departure, and St. Joseph went to engage a beast of burden. It was very difficult to find one, because of the great number of persons who were going to their different cities to be enrolled, in obedience to the imperial edict. At length he found a little ass, which, if he could have known it, was the happiest of all his race, since he carried the Queen of the Universe, and the King of kings, and was present at the birth of the Infant God. During five days the august Mary and St. Joseph were engaged in preparations for the journey. Their provisions consisted of bread, fruits,

and fish, as in going to the house of Zachariah. And as the most prudent Virgin knew that she would be long absent from the house, she secretly arranged her affairs according to the will of God. Finally they recommended it to a person who was to take charge of it until their return.

The hour of departure arrived. The blessed Joseph, who treated his beloved spouse with renewed respect, sought, like a vigilant and faithful servant, to find reasons to serve and please her. He entreated her, with much affection, to make known to him all that she desired for her comfort, and for the good pleasure of the Lord whom she bore in her virginal bosom. Our Queen meekly accepted the holy affection of her spouse: she even consoled and animated him to endure the fatigue of the roads, for His Divine Majesty willed that they should accept the inconveniences of the journey with an equable and joyous heart.

Before setting out, our blessed Lady knelt to ask the benediction of St. Joseph. The man of God excused himself because of her dignity, but the always invincible humility of the august Virgin conquered, and obliged him to give it. She then prayed him to offer himself anew to her most holy Son, and to obtain for her His

divine grace. After these holy preparations they set out for Bethlehem, in the depths of winter, which made the journey more painful and more inconvenient.

The august Mary and the glorious St. Joseph left Nazareth to go to Bethlehem! Poor and humble travellers they were, in the eyes of the world, which had no more esteem for them than it had for humility and poverty. But, O! wonderful secrets of the Most High! hidden from the proud, and impenetrable to the wisdom of the flesh, our travellers were not alone, nor poor, nor despised. They had a magnificent suite, inestimable riches, and a glory unparalleled. They were the highest objects of the care of the eternal Father, and of His immense love. They bore with them the treasures of Heaven, and the Divinity itself.

All the celestial court revered them. The insensible creatures recognized the living ark of the Testament far better than the waters of the Jordan recognized that which was only the type of her. With them were the ten thousand angels, appointed for His Divine Majesty and His holy Mother. The incomparable Mary and her saintly spouse marched with this regal train, unseen by the eyes of mortals. The angels chanted canticles to the Lord, and to His blessed Mother

acknowledging her sometimes as a car, incorruptible and living—sometimes as the fertile ear, which contains the living wheat—sometimes as a richly freighted vessel.

The holy travellers were five days on the way; for the careful husband would not make long journeys. There was no night for our Queen during this time, for the angels threw so bright a radiance around her that the light was equal to the most serene day. St. Joseph enjoyed this favor, and also the view of the angels. They formed a celestial choir, in which our august Lady and her spouse responded to the blessed spirits by canticles and hymns of praise.

The Lord united to these favors some sufferings. The great numbers of persons who thronged the hostelries to obey the imperial edict, were causes of much pain to the modesty of the saintly Mary and her spouse. They were thrust aside as sordid poor, and received less attention than others who seemed richer. Thus our holy travellers, weary and worn, were often received with harsh words at these hostelries. Sometimes they were even sent away as troublesome, and unworthy of consideration, at others, the Mistress of heaven and earth was put into a corner of the vestibule—and even this could not always be secured, and she and St. Joseph

retired to places still less proper or decent in the world's estimation.

The troop of angels followed them everywhere, so that the couch of the true Solomon was guarded from the alarms or surprises of the night. The faithful spouse, seeing the mistress of the universe so well cared for, reposed in peace so as to recover a little from the fatigues of the day; for it frequently happened that, being in the most rigorous season of the year, and arriving at the hostelries half frozen by the snow and rain, they were obliged to take refuge among the animals, because men gave them nothing more commodious.

The Mistress of creatures might easily have commanded the winds and snows, but she forebore, that she might imitate her divine Son in His sufferings. The faithful St. Joseph, nevertheless, took great care to put her under shelter, and also the holy angels; in particular the prince St. Michael, who always assisted on the right of the Queen. Knowing that it was the will of the Lord, they sometimes protected her from the rigor of the weather, and rendered other services to our sweet Lady and to the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARRIVAL AT BETHLEHEM.—BIRTH OF JESUS IN A GROTTO.—61. JOSEPH IS PRESENT AT THIS MYSTERY.

OUR holy travellers, the blessed Mary and St. Joseph, reached Bethlehem on the fifth day of their journey, on Saturday, about four o'clock in the afternoon—the hour when, at the winter solstice, the sun is near his setting, and the night approaches. They entered the town to seek a shelter, and having made inquiries, not only at the inns, but among their relations and friends, they were refused with rudeness and contempt. Our august Lady followed her spouse, who went from house to house—from door to door, in the midst of the crowds who arrived. And, although she knew that the houses of men, like their hearts, were closed against them, she willingly endured all this mortification in obedience to St. Joseph. At the same time it was more painful to find herself in the midst of such a crowd, than to be disap

pointed in finding a lodging. In wandering about the city, they found the house where the register was kept, and, to avoid the necessity of returning there, they inserted their names, and paid the tribute. Then, pursuing their way to find a place of refuge, they applied at more than fifty houses, and were every where refused. The holy angels admired the wonderful mysteries of the Lord, the patience and sweetness of the Virgin Mother, and the insensibility of men.

It was nearly nine o'clock in the evening when the faithful St. Joseph, deeply grieved, turning towards his prudent spouse, "My courage fails me," he said, "to find not only that I cannot lodge you according to your merits, but that I cannot even secure for you such a shelter as is rarely or never refused to the poorest and most contemptible applicant. Doubtless some mystery underlies this. I remember to have seen, without the city walls, a grotto where the shepherds are accustomed to fold their flocks. Let us go there, for if the place is not occupied, you will there receive from heaven the hospitality which men refuse to us."

The most prudent Virgin replied: "Do not afflict yourself, my spouse. The place you speak of is quite conformable to my desires. Change your tears into joy, for we love and we possess

poverty, which is the inestimable treasure of my holy Son. He comes from heaven to seek it. Let us go with pleasure whither the Lord conducts us." Immediately the holy angels guided the saintly pair towards this place; they found it unoccupied, and, full of celestial joy, they praised the Lord.

The palace which the King of kings and Lord of lords had prepared in this world to receive His only Son, incarnate for men, was the lowly and humble grotto where the most pure Mary and St. Joseph had retired, after having been repulsed by all, as it has been related. This place was so unpromising, that, in spite of the extraordinary affluence of strangers at Bethlehem, no one had deigned to occupy it. In fact, it was suitable only to the masters of humility and poverty, and the wisdom of the eternal Father had reserved it for them.

The august Mary and Joseph entered the place, and, by the radiance of the angels, they saw that it was as poor and solitary as they could have wished. They then fell upon their knees, praising the Lord with thanksgivings for this blessing. The grotto was formed out of the natural rock, and was so unequal and rough, that it was fitted only for the lodging of animals.

The angelic spirits assumed a corporeal and

human form. St. Joseph saw them, for it was proper that, on this occasion, he should enjoy this favor, either to diminish his pain, or to animate his spirit and elevate it for the events which the Lord had prepared for this same night. Our blessed Lady, informed of the mystery which was about to be accomplished, resolved herself to cleanse the grotto. The holy Joseph, attentive to the dignity of his admirable spouse, entreated her to leave this care to him. He therefore began to sweep and purify every part of it, and our humble Lady seconded him to the best of her power. The angels also assisted them, until in a short time the grotto was brought into a decent condition, and they filled it with a delightful perfume.

St. Joseph kindled a fire, of which there was much need, for the weather was very cold. They afterwards supped from the remains of food still left; but our sweet Lady ate only on the pressing solicitations of her spouse, whom she desired to obey in all things. At the close of their repast, they returned thanks to God as was their custom, and afterwards discoursed together concerning the mystery of the incarnate Word.

The most prudent Virgin knew that the hour approached. She entreated St. Joseph to seek repose, for the night was far advanced. The

man of God yielded to her solicitations, praying her to follow his example. In order to provide for her the means of rest, he arranged their luggage in such a way as to make up a species of crib, on the floor of the grotto, and, leaving to the august Mary this sort of bed, he withdrew into an angle at the entrance to engage in meditation and prayer. The Holy Spirit came to visit him, and he felt himself drawn by a gentle force that rapt him in ecstasy, during which the events of this night were manifested to him. He remained in this ecstasy until called by his holy spouse. This mysterious slumber of Joseph was more sublime and more fortunate than that of Adam in paradise.

[This would be the place to speak of the wonderful birth of the Infant God, and to admire the prodigies of every kind that accompanied it; but since it is impossible to relate all, we prefer to confine ourselves to what regards St. Joseph exclusively. The reader who desires to be informed of all these circumstances, is referred to the great work of Maria d'Agreda. It is not without lively regret that we omit here the narration of those facts which have commanded the admiration of heaven and earth.]

The evangelist St. Luke relates that the Virgin Mother, having brought forth her first born

Son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger. He does not mention who placed Him in her arms. But the two princes, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, were the ministers on this occasion, and they presented Him to her with as great a reverence as when the priest exposes the holy host. The holy Mother received the Infant God into her arms from these two celestial princes. She served as the altar and sanctuary, which the angels of her guard approached to adore their Creator, and venerate that youthful virgin of fifteen, so worthy to dispense these great mysteries. It was time for the prudent Lady to call her faithful spouse, then in a state of divine ecstasy, where he knew, by revelation, all the mysteries of the sacred birth of this night. It was but just, that, before any other mortal, he should enjoy the honor to see, and the consolation to adore, by means of his senses, the Word made man, since he had been chosen to be the faithful guardian of this sublime mystery.

The saint returned from his ecstasy, and, having recovered the use of his senses, the first object that met his view was the Infant God, in the arms of His Virgin Mother, and leaning upon her sacred face and chaste bosom. He adored Him, on this living altar, with the most pro-

found humility, and with warm tears of tenderness. He kissed His feet with new joy, and with such rapturous affection that, but for the divine assistance, he could not have survived it. Certainly, but for the help of God, he must have lost his senses upon this occasion.

After St. Joseph had adored the Infant, the most discreet Mother asked permission of her Son to seat herself, for she had, until then, remained kneeling. The saint gave her the swaddling clothes, which they had brought, and she wrapped the Infant in them with the highest possible reverence, devotion, and neatness. Afterwards, as it is recorded by St. Luke, the evangelist, she laid Him in the manger, carefully placing therein a little straw and hay, to serve for the first bed of the Incarnate Word on earth. It was then that, guided by the Divine will, an ox came from the field, and joining the ass, which they had brought with them, they warmed, by their breath, the Infant God whom men had refused to receive. And thus was miraculously accomplished the prophecy of Isaiah: "*The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel hath not known me:*" Is. i. 3.

The heavenly courtiers, having celebrated, in the grotto of Bethlehem, the birth of their Incarnate God, and our Redeemer, many of them

were sent to different places to announce the happy tidings to those who were prepared to hear them. The prince St. Michael was directed to the fathers in Limbo, to inform them that the only Son of the Eternal Father, who was made man, had just been born. He bore messages, on the part of the blessed Mother, to St. Joachim and St. Anna. For this numerous assembly of the just it was the day of great consolation.

Another angel was sent to St. Elizabeth and her son John, who adored their Incarnate God. As soon as St. Elizabeth heard of it, she instantly despatched a messenger to Bethlehem with presents to the Mother of the Infant God, consisting of a small sum of money, linen, and other things, to supply the wants of the poor Mother and her saintly spouse. But the messenger had no orders but to visit her cousin and St. Joseph, to leave her gifts, to inform himself of their necessities, and quickly to bring her news of them. On his return, he recounted to St. Elizabeth the poverty of her relative, of the Child and Joseph, and the strange feelings that he had experienced while with them.

Other angels also went to announce the same glad tidings to Zachariah, to Simeon, and to Anna, the prophetess, because the Lord found each pre-

pared to receive them with advantage. All the just then living on the earth, although unacquainted with this mystery, were, nevertheless, sensible of its divine effects when the Saviour was born. To some, indeed, the Lord revealed it, and of this number were the Magi, who were inspired with renewed desires to seek Him.

The neighboring shepherds were blest above all others. They were of those who waited for and desired the coming of the Messiah; and, humble and poor, they were engaged in watching their flocks at the time of the birth. Hence they were in a state of holy preparation: they merited to be the first-called. The archangel St. Gabriel was sent to them. They were troubled at seeing him, but the celestial prince reassured them. Illuminated by the Divine wisdom, they set off for Bethlehem, to witness the miracle of which they had just heard. On entering the grotto, they found, as it is said by St. Luke, Mary and Joseph, and the Infant laid in a manger.

The divine Infant looked upon them, and, prostrate, they adored the incarnate Word. The blessed Mother was attentive to all. She spoke with the shepherds, and instructed them. They made, afterwards, several other visits, during the sojourn of the holy family in the grotto,

and brought them presents proportioned to their poverty. They did not speak of what they had seen until after the blessed Mary, the Infant, and St Joseph had departed from Bethlehem. Their testimony was not believed by all; but Herod believed, only not with a holy faith They were, nevertheless, saints, and filled with divine science, even to their death.

The coming of the incarnate Word was terrible only for hell. Many things were concealed from Lucifer and his agents, which he might naturally have known; but he considered it an idle fancy to believe that the Word would come and establish His power in so obscure and humble a manner. The Mother of wisdom penetrated all the deceit of Lucifer. She glorified the Lord, and offered prayers for all of the human race, who, by their sins, had made themselves unworthy to recognize the Light who had just been born to redeem them.

CHAPTER IX.

SENTIMENTS OF THE AUGUST MOTHER AND ST. JOSEPH FOR THE INFANT GOD.—THE CIRCUMCISION.—THE SPOUSES GIVE HIM THE NAME OF JESUS.

DURING the time that our august Lady abode in the grotto, which was an incommodious place, and exposed to the inclemency of the weather, she took the greatest care to protect her tender and sweet Child. She had brought coverings with her for this purpose, and she held Him almost constantly in her arms, except when she left Him in those of St. Joseph. She wished to afford him the gratification to aid her in this service, and that he should serve the Incarnate God in the office of father.

The first time the saint received the Infant God, our blessed Lady said to him, "Receive within your arms, my spouse, the Creator of heaven and earth. Enjoy His sweet companionship, so that my Lord and my God may take delight in you." And speaking interiorly

with the divine Infant she said, "Rest in the arms of your servant and friend Joseph, my spouse. It pains me to be without you for a single instant, but I wish to share my blessing with him who is worthy of it." The faithful St. Joseph, conscious of this new happiness, humbled himself profoundly. "Queen of the universe," he replied, "how can I dare, I who am so unworthy, to hold in my arms the same God in whose presence the pillars of heaven tremble. Supply my deficiencies, my baseness, and pray His divine Majesty to regard me with clemency." The holy man, hesitating between his desire to receive the Infant God and the respectful fear that held him back, offered to Him acts of love, faith, humility and respect. He fell on his knees, and received Him with a holy trembling and inconceivable veneration from the hands of His blessed mother, shedding gentle tears of joy. The Infant God regarded him with a caressing air; and at the same time renovated his soul by His divine influence. The faithful Joseph, finding himself enriched by so many and such magnificent benefits, gave utterance to new canticles of praise. After enjoying for a time the ineffable delight of folding the Lord in his arms, he restored Him to His blessed mother They both placed themselves on their

knees to give or to receive Him, and at all times with the same veneration. They made three genuflexions before approaching His divine Majesty, kissing the earth with the greatest humility and adoration.

Much more might be said of the veneration observed by the blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the angelic spirits towards the Infant God. When the saint was occupied, St. Michael or St. Gabriel bore Him in their arms. No tongue can do justice to the canticles of praise and glory which the Queen of Heaven chanted with the angels and St. Joseph, who, of all mortals, was most happy and most favored in this respect Besides these favors, he received another, most precious to his soul. His most gentle spouse in speaking with him of the Infant, called Him often, *your son*, not that He was really the son of St. Joseph, for He was the Son only of the Eternal Father, and of His Virgin Mother This favor was an unspeakable joy to the Saint, and his spouse often renewed it.

In regard to the circumcision of her Son, the wise Mary had no express order from the Eternal Father. She considered, on the one hand, that her holy Son came to confirm the law in fulfilling it himself, and more than this, to suffer for mankind: hence He would not refuse the pain of circumcision.

But, on the other hand, maternal love and compassion led her to desire the exemption of her beloved Son from the sufferings consequent upon it. She confided her sentiments regarding this mystery to her chaste spouse, who so tenderly ympathized in these mingled feelings, that he was moved to tears.

Before the eight days after His birth were accomplished, the Queen of Heaven addressed herself in prayer to the Divine Majesty, who thus responded: "You know well that you must offer Me your son and Mine to endure this, and other far greater sufferings. Let Him then shed His blood, and give me the first fruits of the eternal salvation of men."

The august Mary then explained to St. Joseph, with rare prudence, the reasons why he should prepare himself for the circumcision of the Infant God. She reminded him that the time prescribed by the law approached, and that they must submit to it, having no order to the contrary. Her saintly spouse replied: "That he would conform himself to the Divine pleasure in all things made manifest by the common law." He then inquired how the circumcision should be performed.

The Blessed Virgin said, that, in fulfilling the law, she would not be separated from the Infant,

nor place Him in charge of any other person, but that she would support Him in her own arms. Yet since, from His temperament, His pain would be greater than that of ordinary children, it would be necessary to be prepared with remedies for the wound. The careful mother prayed St. Joseph also to seek a vial of crystal in which to gather the precious blood, which she wished to preserve; and she had linen cloths also ready, so that not a drop should fall on the ground. St. Joseph then went to call a priest, whom he begged to come to the grotto to perform the rite of circumcision, as being the legitimate minister for this office.

The august Mary and St. Joseph discoursed together respecting the name which they should give to the Infant God in the circumcision. "When the angel," said St. Joseph, "declared to me the great mystery of the incarnation, he commanded me to call your divine Son *Jesus*." The Virgin Mother replied: "He made the same declaration to me when the Word was made flesh in my bosom. Therefore we will request the priest to give Him this name on the register of circumcised children."

While the Queen of Heaven and St. Joseph held this discourse, innumerable troops of angels descended from heaven in human form, and

of incomparable beauty. They bore a device, upon which was engraved the name of Jesus. The two archangels, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, each held in their hands a luminous globe of wondrous beauty and splendor, within which was written the most holy name of Jesus. They thus addressed their Queen: "This name which you see is that of your Son. The most Holy Trinity have given it to your only Son our Lord, with power to save the human race. He will chastise His enemies, and reduce them to serve as His foot-stool. He will exalt His friends, and place them in glory at His right hand. But all this must be purchased by His sufferings and His blood."

The most happy St. Joseph saw and heard all. He was unable to penetrate the mysteries of the redemption like the mother of wisdom, but he discovered some of them. The holy spouses, were filled with joy and admiration—in brief, there passed between them, or in their presence, at various times, so many wonderful things, that it would be impossible to convey any just idea of them.

There was at Bethlehem a synagogue, not for offering sacrifices, which could be offered only at Jerusalem, but to read there the Law of Moses. The priest, who was minister of the law,

was also of the rite of circumcision. Nevertheless, any one could circumcise. Our august Mother desired, because of the dignity of the Infant, that the priest should be the minister, and for this reason it was that the happy St. Joseph summoned him. The priest came to the grotto. At the view of the Mother and the Child his heart was sensibly touched with singular devotion and tenderness. The happiness which he enjoyed in touching the flesh of the Infant God renewed him by a secret power, and rendered him holy and agreeable to the supreme Lord of the universe.

In order to perform the circumcision with all the respect that was possible in such a place, St. Joseph lighted candles. The priest requested the Virgin Mother to withdraw for a little space, to avoid the pain of witnessing the sacrifice, but she prayed the minister of God to permit her to assist at the sacrament. The priest then consented that she should support the Infant in her arms. Thus she was the consecrated altar upon which the verities represented by the ancient sacrifices began to be accomplished.

The blessed Mother unswathed her divine child, and, drawing from her bosom a linen cloth, she placed it under the Infant, so that it should receive the blood and the relics of the circum-

cision. The priest accomplished his office, and the Infant God offered to the Eternal Father three things of such infinite value, that each would suffice for the redemption of a thousand worlds: the first was the form of a sinner; the second, the pain He suffered as man; the third, His most ardent love, with which He began to shed His blood for the redemption of men. The tender and affectionate Mother gathered the sacred relics and the blood shed upon the linen, and placed the whole in the care of St. Joseph.

The priest inquired of the holy spouses what name they intended to give to the circumcised child. Our sweet Lady, always attentive to the respect which she bore to St. Joseph, requested him to declare it. The Saint, turning towards her with veneration, intimated that so sweet a name should be pronounced by her lips—when, by a divine disposition, Mary and Joseph said: at the same moment, "*Jesus is His name.*" The priest replied, "You are of one mind in this, the name you give to the Infant is great." In writing it he was touched by a great interior tenderness, saying to them, "I assure you that I believe this child will be a great prophet of the Lord." The august spouses replied to the priest by an humble acknowledgment, and, hav-

ing given him the wax lights, and some other trifles as offerings, he departed.

The holy Virgin and her spouse remained alone with the Infant. They celebrated anew the mystery of the circumcision by canticles, which they composed in honor of the most sweet name of Jesus. The careful Mother dressed the wound of the Infant God with the usual remedies. She invited the angels to sing. The ministers of the Most High obeyed their Queen, and with heavenly melody they chanted the same canticles which she and St. Joseph had composed in praise of the most sweet name of Jesus.

CHAPTER X.

THE ROYAL MAGI COME TO ADORE THE INFANT GOD IN THE GROTTO OF THE NATIVITY.—ST. JOSEPH IS PRESENT AT THIS MYSTERY.

OUR blessed Lady knew, by infused science from the Holy Scriptures, that the Magi would come from the East, to acknowledge and adore her most holy Son. She had been informed of this approaching mystery by the angel who had been sent to these kings to announce the birth of the incarnate Word. St. Joseph had received no intelligence of this mystery, because it had not been revealed to him: therefore, the circumcision having been celebrated, the holy man proposed to our sweet Lady to quit their poor abode, for now they could easily find some hostelry in Bethlehem to which they could retire, until the time should come to present the Infant in the temple of Jerusalem.

This most faithful and careful spouse was in continual distress at not being able to procure for the Son and His mother the comforts which

they had need of, yet he referred all to the wishes of his spouse. The humble Mary replied, without revealing the mystery: "I am ready to do all that you command; do whatever you judge to be best." This virtuous indifference threw St. Joseph into greater perplexity, for he had hoped that his spouse would decide what should be done.

While they conferred together, the Lord answered by the ministry of the princes, St. Michael and St. Gabriel: "The Divine will ordains that the three kings who come from the East to seek the King of Heaven shall adore in this same place the Word made man. It is ten days since they began their journey, and they will very soon be here." By this new information, St. Joseph was consoled and informed of the will of the Lord. The blessed Virgin remarked that, "Although this place may be poor and uncomfortable to the eyes of the world, it is, nevertheless, precious, since the Lord is content with it." These words of our prudent Lady afforded a sensible joy to St. Joseph, who replied, "That they could, perhaps, remain in this holy place until the day of the presentation in the temple, without returning first to Nazareth, because of the distance and the severity of the season; and if they should be obliged by stress

of weather to leave it, they might easily find a shelter in Jerusalem, since it was distant only two leagues from Bethlehem.

The august Mary conformed in all things to the wishes of her husband. She prepared the grotto for the reception of the Magi, as well as the poverty of the place admitted, and used her power over creatures to protect her Son from the rigor of the winter. Neither the wind, the snow, nor the rain dared to approach Him, but paused at a safe distance. The Mother, nevertheless, suffered from the cold; while St. Joseph enjoyed, with the Infant God, the benign effects of that privilege; but he knew not that this exemption was owing to the commandment of his blessed spouse.

It often happened that while our sweet Lady held the Infant God in her arms, she knelt to adore Him. She entrusted Him to St. Joseph with the respect which we have already mentioned. She embraced His feet, and when she desired to kiss Him on the face, she requested, in an interior voice, His consent. In all she was most prudent, most perfect, without deficiency or excess. But there were between the Infant God and His Virgin Mother, other caresses far more sublime. She was made acquainted with the interior acts of the most holy soul of her Son.

His humanity was manifested to her as in a luminous crystal, and the blessed Virgin beheld the hypostatic union, the soul of the Divine Child and all its operations. Then our humble Lady imitated Him in His works, and in His prayers.

The most happy St. Joseph enjoyed not only the favors and caresses of the Infant God, as an ocular witness of those which passed between the Son and the Mother, but he was found worthy to receive them from Jesus himself. When our blessed Lady was engaged in preparing their food, or in other household occupations, she placed the Infant God in his hands. While St. Joseph held Him, his pious soul thrilled with divine emotions, for the Infant Jesus regarded him with satisfaction; He reclined on his bosom, and bestowed on him marks of infantine affection.

Whenever the august Mary separated herself from the Infant God, she took with her the relics of the circumcision, which St. Joseph usually carried about him for his own consolation. Thus the two spouses were always enriched—the sacred Virgin by her divine Son, and the happy Joseph by the precious blood that had been shed, and the Deified flesh. They preserved these holy relics in the little vial of crystal, which the saint had purchased. Our blessed Lady placed in it the flesh that was removed,

and the blood that was shed in the circumcision, for she had cut out all those places of the linen which had received it. She afterwards placed this precious deposit in charge of the Apostles, and left it to them as the property of the holy Church.

The Magi kings, who came to seek the new-born Infant God, were natives of a country east of Palestine. David, and Balaam, also, had prophesied their coming. They were very learned in the natural sciences, and in the Scriptures of the people of God. They had some belief in the advent of the Messiah. For the rest, they were men of great probity, loving truth and practising justice. They were neighbors, and lived in intimate friendship and faithful correspondence. They had noble, great, and generous souls, free from the avarice which too frequently degrades the hearts of princes. They were warned, by the ministry of angels, of the birth of the incarnate Word. With clear and abundant instructions, the guardian angel of each declared to them in a dream, and at the same time, the mystery of the incarnation and the birth of the Redeemer. They knew that this new-born Infant was true God and true man, whom they ought to adore as their Creator and Redeemer, and that the star, which Balaam

had predicted, would be given as their guide to conduct them to the place where He would be found.

The Magi kings awoke, and in spirit they adored the immutable being of God, and glorified His mercy for that the Word had taken human flesh in the bosom of a Virgin, to redeem the world, and they prepared to depart, that they might find Him. At the same time, the holy angel formed a star which was suspended in the air, to conduct the kings to the grotto. In leaving their homes they saw it, and followed the route which it indicated. Thus guided, they arrived at Jerusalem, when it disappeared. They then inquired where was the King of the Jews, who had just been born.

Herod, as it is recorded by St. Matthew, assembled the chief priests and scribes, who replied: "According to the prophecy of Micah, the Messiah is to be born at Bethlehem." Herod called the Magi, and inquired of them the time when they had first observed the appearance of the star. He then said to them: "When you shall have found this Child, inform me of it, so that I, too, may go and adore Him." On passing out of Jerusalem, the Magi again saw the star, which stood over the grotto of the nativity.

The Lord had made known to the august Mother the coming of the Magi, and when she heard they were near the grotto, she mentioned it to St. Joseph, in order that he might remain at her side, which he did. Although the Evangelists make no mention of it, it is nevertheless certain that St. Joseph was present when the kings adored the Infant Jesus. The Magi already knew that St. Joseph was not His real father, and that His mother was a Virgin. The admirable Mother awaited these pious kings with the Infant God in her arms. An extraordinary splendor shone forth from the Infant, and our sweet Lady was exceedingly beautiful. They were lost in admiration, adoring the Infant, and acknowledging Him as true God and true man. Then rising up, they bent the knee before the Mother in testimony of their veneration, and offered their felicitations on the happiness that she enjoyed in being the Mother of the Son of the Eternal Father.

The three kings prostrated themselves anew, and adored the Infant Jesus. Afterwards they addressed themselves to St. Joseph, and congratulated him on his happiness in being the spouse of the Mother of God. Having passed three hours in the grotto, the kings requested permission to go and seek a lodging in the city.

to sojourn there. Several persons accompanied the Magi, but they, alone, participated in the effects of grace and knowledge. The holy Mary and Joseph remained with God, and glorified the Divine Majesty in new canticles of praise, because His holy name began to be known and adored among the nations.

The three kings left the grotto to seek repose in a hostelry of Bethlehem. They passed a great part of the night in discourse, intermingled with many tears and sighs, respecting what they had seen in the Infant God and His holy Mother. They ceased not to admire the splendor that shone from the Infant Jesus, the modesty of the blessed Mother, the holiness of the happy St. Joseph.

During this conference, the Magi were not unmindful of the great destitution of Jesus, Mary, and St. Joseph, in the grotto, and they therefore sent to them, by their servants, liberal supplies of provisions. The august Mary and Joseph received them with gratitude, nor did they reply by empty thanks, but by efficacious benedictions. The Magi disposed themselves to sleep, and the angel warned them of the way in which they should proceed.

As soon as it was day they returned to the grotto of the nativity, to offer the gifts

they had brought. They prostrated themselves before the celestial King, and adored Him with profound humility: afterwards, opening their treasures, as it is related in the Gospels, they offered to Him gold and frankincense and myrrh. Our blessed Mother received these gifts of the kings, and presented them to the Infant Jesus in their name. They also offered to the sweet Mother their services, their resources, and all that they possessed. Our prudent Lady thanked them for all these offers, but she would accept nothing. The kings then besought her not to forget them, which she promised. They asked the same of St. Joseph. Having received the benediction of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, they took leave, with such an effusion of tenderness and affection, that it seemed their hearts would melt. To avoid meeting Herod, they resolved not to pass through Jerusalem. All the remaining lives of these blessed kings were in harmony with their divine vocation.

After their departure, our Lady and St. Joseph chanted new canticles of praise. They compared these wonderful incidents with the Holy Scriptures, and with the prophecies of the Prophets and Patriarchs, and they saw, with unspeakable joy, that their predictions began to be accomplished in the Infant Jesus.

CHAPTER XI.

OUR LADY AND ST. JOSEPH LEAVE THE GROTTO OF THE NATIVITY, AND REMAIN AT BETHLEHEM UNTIL THE PRESENTATION OF THE INFANT JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

AFTER the adoration of the Infant Jesus by the Magi, our saints resolved to quit the grotto, since nothing more was expected there. The prudent Mother said to St. Joseph: "My spouse, these presents, which the Magi have left for our God, ought not to be useless. I must not occupy myself with temporalities, therefore I pray you dispose of all as belonging to my Son and to you."

The faithful spouse replied, with his accustomed humility and meekness, "That it was but right she should distribute them herself." The blessed Virgin persisted, saying: "You ught to do it, to exercise charity towards the poor, who claim the part that belongs to them." After this humble contestation, the august Mary and St. Joseph decided to divide the gifts into

three parts; one for the temple at Jerusalem, another for the priest who had circumcised the Infant, the remainder for the poor.

The Almighty, to induce them to leave the grotto, inspired a poor woman, who was honest and charitable, to visit our Queen. She lived in a house that stood against the wall of the city, quite near the holy place. Having heard of the coming of the Magi, she inquired of the blessed Virgin if she knew that certain wise men, who were said to be three kings, were come to seek for the Messiah. Our Princess took occasion from this, to instruct her, without declaring the mystery of her Son; whereupon this woman offered them her house, pressing her strongly to accept the invitation, seeing the incommodities of the grotto for our Lady, her spouse, and the Child.

Our Queen did not refuse the offer. A little time afterwards she spoke of it to St. Joseph, and they determined to make their abode in that house until the time should come for the purification and the presentation in the temple. That which decided them was, that a crowd of people began to come to the grotto. Our sweet Lady, St. Joseph and the Infant, left it with much regret, because of their veneration for it, and directed their steps to the house of the poor

woman, who received them with the greatest cordiality. After they had quitted it, the Lord sent an angel to guard the grotto, and this angel still guards it with a flaming sword, so that no animal has entered it since that time. If he does not hinder the entrance of the enemies of the faith, it is by the secret judgment of the Most High. Christian princes could aid in this miracle if they set themselves with ardor to recover the holy places. It has been declared to me, that veneration for the Holy Land is one of the most powerful and efficacious means to establish and confirm the Catholic monarchies.

The august Mary prepared herself, by fervent desires, to offer in the temple her adorable Infant to the Eternal Father. She embellished her soul by the practice of the highest virtues. The Infant Jesus conversed with His Mother, but in an intelligible voice only when she was alone. Her holy spouse did not enjoy this happiness until a year after His birth.

During the time which our august Queen passed at Bethlehem, she was visited by many persons, who were nearly all of the poorest class. They spoke of the arrival of the Magi, and of the coming of the Messiah. By a disposition of divine Providence, the approaching birth was a subject of public conversation among the Jews

The prudent Mother had various occasions to practise great virtues. Those good people held such fabulous discussions upon matters of religion, that the ingenuous St. Joseph smiled at them, but, at the same time, admired the impressive replies of our great Lady, and the divine wisdom with which she instructed them.

The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph remained with the divine Infant, in their humble dwelling at Bethlehem, until the close of the forty days prescribed for presenting Him in the temple. This period being fulfilled, our Lady and St. Joseph prepared for the journey. They resolved to offer the only Son of the Eternal Father according to the law, knowing His desire to be submissive to the law, and to be offered to His divine Father. Having fixed the day of departure, they took leave of their pious hostess, whom they left crowned with celestial benedictions.

They went first to visit the grotto of the nativity. The blessed Mother gave the Infant to St. Joseph, and, prostrate on the earth, she venerated this holy place. Her holy spouse did the same, with inexpressible devotion. Then the Blessed Virgin requested leave of St. Joseph to make the journey barefooted, and to carry the holy Infant in her arms. Our august Lady usually wore a kind of shoes which covered the

feet. The thread was taken from a plant resembling hemp, which was suitable for the poor.

St. Joseph, having requested her to rise, thus replied: "The Son of the Eternal Father, whom I have within my arms, gives you His benediction. I am well pleased that you should go on foot, carrying Him, but not barefooted. Be content with your pious desire, which will be agreeable to the Lord, who has inspired it." St. Joseph sometimes used authority towards the august Mary, but it was always with great respect. He used this authority as head, only that she might not be deprived of the consolation she enjoyed in the practice of humility and obedience; and as the saint obeyed her in so doing, he mortified and humbled himself in commanding her, and thus both were obedient and humble.

St. Joseph refused to allow her to go to Jerusalem barefooted, because he feared the cold might injure her health; but his fears arose from his ignorance of the admirable nature of her virginal constitution. Our blessed Lady, implicitly obedient to her spouse, did not make the journey barefooted. They left the grotto, after having asked the benediction of the Infant God, who bestowed it, perceptibly, upon them. St. Joseph loaded the ass with the

package of swaddling clothes, and that portion of the gifts of the Magi which they had reserved as an offering at the temple. All the celestial court accompanied them, in visible forms. Our blessed Lady and her spouse enjoyed their vision. These heavenly spirits celebrated the mystery by new and admirable canticles, and, thus disposed, they traversed the two leagues which separated Bethlehem from Jerusalem. The weather was severe—nor did this happen without the particular providence of God. Nothing was to be seen but frost and ice, so that the Creator made Man trembled with cold, like one of mere human birth. He wept in the arms of His loving Mother. Our potent Queen addressed herself to the winds and elements, and commanded them, authoritatively, to become milder. They obeyed the order of their legitimate mistress for the Infant, without changing towards her.

During this time, and while our blessed Lady was on the way with the Infant Jesus, the chief priest, Simeon, had a revelation that the incarnate Word was coming to the temple, in His Mother's arms, to offer himself to God. The same revelation was made to the holy widow, Anna, and it was revealed to her, and the high priest, also, that St. Joseph was with his most

pure spouse. And having communicated to each other what had just been revealed to them, they agreed to send the steward of the temple to meet them, after having instructed him how to recognize our holy travellers. The steward executed the order he had received, which proved a great consolation to our august Queen and St. Joseph. The fortunate host left them in his house, and went to give an account of his mission to the high priest.

The saintly spouses formed their plans the same evening. Our ever-prudent Lady advised St. Joseph to go at once and present the gifts of the kings at the temple, so as to avoid attracting public attention. She also prayed him to bring, on his return, the turtle doves, which they intended to offer publicly the following day. St. Joseph executed all in such a manner that he seemed only an ordinary stranger, who offered myrrh, incense, and gold to the receiver of the gifts at the temple. He did not use any portion of them to purchase a lamb, because this would not have accorded with their poor and humble condition. Neither did they depart, in the least particular, from the poverty and humility which they held in such high esteem, even though it might have tended towards good and pious ends.

Simeon was, according to St. Luke, a just man, fearing God, and awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he should see Christ the Lord before his death. On that night he was instructed by Divine illumination, and discovered, with great clearness, all the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption of the human race. By the knowledge of these sublime revelations he was elevated above himself. The same night St. Anna had also a revelation of many of these mysteries, from which she received unspeakable consolation.

The day having come when the Son of Justice was to appear, our blessed Lady prepared the turtle doves and two lights. She then wrapped the infant Jesus in His swaddling-clothes, and set out, with her saintly spouse, for the temple. Arrived at the gates, the happy mother adored the Lord in spirit and in truth, and made an offering to the divine Majesty of herself with her Son whom she held in her arms. The most ortunate of men, St. Joseph, felt at the same noment a new and sweet effusion of the Holy Spirit, which filled him with joy and divine light.

Conducted by the same Spirit, the high priest Simeon came to the temple, and, approaching the place where Mary stood with Jesus, he beheld

them all radiant with light. Anna approached and saw it, also. Simeon took the Infant in his arms, and offering Him to the eternal Father, intoned the celebrated canticle, "*Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace.*" Afterwards he announced the cruel passion which the heart of Mary must suffer at the view of the sufferings of Jesus.

The blessed Mary and St. Joseph admired the sublimity of the Spirit which had inspired Simeon. The holy old man gave his benediction to the happy parents and to the Infant. When the holy priest prophesied the passion, the Infant humbly inclined His head, in testimony that He accepted the prophecy, and would fulfil it. The tender mother comprehended all the mysteries included within this prophecy. On his part, the holy St. Joseph also penetrated many things concerning the redemption and the sufferings of Jesus, but his knowledge was less comprehensive than that of his spouse, because he was not to witness their accomplishment on earth.

The Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph took leave of the high priest, after having received his benediction, and that of St. Anna, and returned to the house which had been prepared for them. Here they resolved to remain nine days longer, to visit the temple and to renew there, each day,

the offering of the most holy Host, with devout thanksgivings. The number nine had always been dear to the holy family. They began their novena and remained in the temple from before the hour of tierce to the evening, choosing the most humble and retired quarter. It was at this time the divine Majesty promised that the august mother should obtain all that she would ask for those who were devoted to her, as long as the world was to endure, and even for great sinners, if they would avail themselves of her intercession.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LORD PREPARES OUR BLESSED LADY FOR THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.—THE ANGEL REVEALS IT TO ST. JOSEPH.—JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH COMMENCE THE JOURNEY.

ON the fifth day of the novena, after the Presentation, the Blessed Virgin had a vision of the Divinity, in which she was warned to fly into Egypt because Herod sought to destroy the new-born Messiah. The Lord referred her to St. Joseph, to be guided by him in all things relating to this journey. But the exceeding affection of our Lady for her most holy Son grieved her heart, on considering the pain which so young a child must suffer in executing this command. She was touched with compassion, and could not restrain her tears.

The faithful St. Joseph observed the affliction of his spouse, and supposed it to be the effect of the prophecy of St. Simeon. But as he had a tender affection for our queen, and was also of a most compassionate temper, he was troubled at the affliction of his spouse; and it was for this

reason that the angel appeared to him in a dream. During this same night, as it is related by St. Matthew, the angel of the Lord said to him, "*Arise, and take the child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass, that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him.*"

Filled with zeal and anxiety, St. Joseph arose on the instant, and, approaching the place whither his beloved spouse had retired, he said to her, "It is the will of the Most High, that we shall be afflicted, for His angel has declared to me the command of His Majesty, that we shall fly with the Infant into Egypt, because Herod designs to destroy His life. Prepare, then, for the fatigues of this journey, and tell me what I can do for your comfort, and for the service of our most sweet Infant." "My spouse," replied our queen, "if we receive so much good at the liberal hands of the Most High, it is but just that we should receive from Him temporal pains and afflictions."

The blessed Mother and St. Joseph approached the cradle where the Infant Jesus slept; nor was this slumber without mystery. The holy Mother thus addressed Him: "Flee away, O my beloved, and be like to the roe, and to the young hart; come, let us go to the fields." St.

Joseph added: "Thy power cannot be limited by that of the kings of the earth, but Thine exalted wisdom would conceal it. Who can fathom the impenetrable secrets of Thy Providence?" Our august Lady then awakened the Infant. Our loving Saviour, willing to show, by certain marks, that He was of true human nature, and to affect His parents, wept a little, but soon He became quiet.

The holy Virgin and St. Joseph asked a benediction of the Divine Infant, which He bestowed in a manner not to be mistaken. Then gathering their humble garments, they departed, without further delay, a little after midnight, making use of the same beast of burden which they had brought from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They travelled with all diligence towards Egypt, quitting Jerusalem to go to another country, concealed by the silence and obscurity of the night.

It is not possible to find faith and hope more firm than that of our Queen and her faithful spouse, but they were pained because of the Infant Jesus. They knew not what might happen to them on this long journey, nor where it was to terminate, nor how they would be received in Egypt, nor how they could educate this Child. But the angels strengthened them in such wise,

that, issuing from Jerusalem by the gate towards Nazareth, they began their journey with great ardor.

The Blessed Virgin could have wished to pass through Hebron, where at this moment St. Elizabeth sojourned, and because it was but little out of their way; but the prudent St. Joseph, who was in great apprehension of Herod, could not consent to the least delay. "I think," said he, "that it is of the greatest importance not to retard our journey for even a moment, but to hasten it as much as possible, so as to be removed from danger. For this reason we ought not to pause at Hebron, where we should, perhaps, be sought after sooner than elsewhere." The Blessed Virgin obeyed St. Joseph, not only in that which he commanded, but she would not even send an angel to her cousin without his consent. What an admirable example to teach us to renounce our own will, which is often so prejudicial to us!

The angel having instructed St. Elizabeth, she desired to come and adore the Infant Jesus, but the celestial ambassador prevented her She then sent a person to convey, in all haste, food and money to the holy family, with clothing for the Child. This messenger found them at the city of Gaza, distant twenty hours from

Jerusalem, by the road that leads from Palestine to Egypt.

Our holy travellers remained two days in this town, on account of the fatigue of St. Joseph, and to give rest to the ass, which carried our Queen. They dismissed the servant of Elizabeth, and St. Joseph charged him to reveal to no one the place where he had found them. The Lord appointed a better means of securing this silence. He destroyed his memory of the fact.

The charitable Mary shared the presents of Elizabeth with the poor, whom she never forgot Of the cloth she made a covering for the Infant, and a mantle for St. Joseph, capable of protecting them from the severity of the weather. She also prepared such of the provisions as could be preserved, to provide for the necessities of her Son and St. Joseph, without having recourse to miraculous assistance.

The happy St. Joseph was a witness of the mysteries which passed between the blessed Mother and the Infant Jesus. The holy Mary understood, through intellectual visions, the unity of the Divine Essence with the Trinity of persons; the eternal generation of the Word, and the procession of the Holy Ghost without priority or posteriority. Finally, the august Mother contemplated all the interior acts of her only

Son, and imitated them. The happy Joseph was often a witness of these divine mysteries, and received illumination from them which smoothed the difficulties of the road.

From time to time our saint took care to inquire of his spouse how she found herself, and if she had need of any thing for the Infant or herself. He approached Him and adored: he kissed His feet and asked His benediction. Sometimes he took Him in his arms. Thus our great patriarch overcame gently all the fatigues of the journey. His holy spouse encouraged him; yet external things never interfered with her sublime thoughts and affections.

Three days after their arrival at Gaza, our saintly travellers set out for Egypt. They then entered the sandy desert called Beersheba, which has an extent of sixty leagues before reaching Heliopolis, near Cairo. They made short journeys, because of the sand. Many events happened to the holy family. The Most High allowed them to suffer from the hardships of the desert. Our blessed Lady was much distressed, but she supported them with patience for the sake of her Son and husband. St. Joseph, on his part, suffered greatly from his inability to protect the Infant and Mother, notwithstanding all his cares.

In traversing the desert, it was absolutely necessary that they should pass the nights in the open air, and without shelter; and it was in winter, and the month of February The first night which overtook them, obliged them to stop at the foot of a hill. The Queen of Heaven seated herself on the sand with her Son in her arms, and they supped on what they had brought from Gaza. The Blessed Virgin gave milk to her Infant Jesus, and His Majesty consoled them in many pleasing and caressing ways. The saint raised a sort of little tent with his mantle and some sticks, so that the Incarnate Word and His holy Mother should not be exposed to the night air. Our great Lady knew that her most holy Son offered this affliction to the Eternal Father, together with His sufferings, and those of herself and St. Joseph. She united with Him in prayer. St. Joseph slept on the ground, his head supported by the little box of swaddling clothes and their other poor apparel. The following day they continued their route, and then their provision of bread and fruits failed them, so that the Mistress of the Universe and her holy spouse, feeling the pressure of hunger, found themselves in the direst distress, and, although that of the saint was the most severe, both were in the greatest affliction. Thus they

passed one of the first days of their journey, until nine in the evening, without nourishment. Our blessed Lady then addressed herself to the Most High. "Eternal and Almighty God," said she, "I offer to Thee thanks, and I bless Thee. How, being only a poor useless creature, how shall I dare to ask any thing for myself? But have regard to Thine only Son, and grant the means to sustain His natural life, and to preserve that of my spouse!" The Most High permitted that to the rigors of the elements should be joined those of hunger, exhaustion, and of this sort of abandonment—and then came a tempest of wind and rain, that wearied them extremely.

The careful Mother, exercising her power as Queen of creatures, commanded the elements not to offend their Creator, and to reserve for her their rude attacks. The Infant Jesus, to recompense this loving care, gave commands to His angels, and they formed a luminous globe, impenetrable to the weather, which inclosed their God made man, the Blessed Virgin, and her spouse. This protection was bestowed on other occasions, also, while crossing the desert.

But food was wanting, and this want which could not be supplied by any human industry, was most pressing. The Lord then helped them by the ministry of angels, who furnished them

with bread and excellent fruits, and brought them, besides, a beverage of delicious flavor. Upon this, they sang canticles of praise to the Lord, who feeds all flesh, at a convenient season. Such was the repast which the Lord made for His three travellers in the same desert, where Elias, flying from Jezebel, was strengthened by bread baked in the ashes which the angel of the Lord brought him.

None of the miracles wrought in favor of the Jewish people are worthy to be compared with those which the Lord wrought during this journey for His Son made man, and the august Mary and St. Joseph, to preserve the natural life on which depended the salvation of the human race. But the Lord always waited until the necessity was most urgent. Let the poor rejoice in this example—let not the hungry be cast down—let those who suffer persecution expect help in season, and let none complain of Divine Providence! When was it ever that the Lord failed to help those who put their trust in Him? Come! come to Him with humility and confidence! The eyes of your fathers regard you with fixed attention!

The Most High not only took care to nourish our pilgrims, but He also offered them sensible recreations, to soothe the weariness of the way

It often happened that the blessed Mother, pausing with the Infant God, was speedily surrounded by large numbers of birds. The blessed Queen received them, and commanded them to praise their Creator: the birds obeyed, and the devoted Mother recreated the Infant Jesus in the sweetest canticles. The holy angels joined their voices to that of our lovely Lady.

The Son and the Mother sometimes held interior communications, so sublime, that words are inadequate to express them. The holy St. Joseph participated in some of these mysteries, and their divine consolations made him forget his fatigue while he enjoyed the delights of such society; but he knew not that the Infant conversed with His Mother.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOLY FAMILY ARRIVE AT HELIOPOLIS.—THEY FIX THEIR RESIDENCE IN THAT CITY.

THE flight of the Incarnate Word had other mysteries, and other ends, besides that of withdrawing from the effects of Herod's anger. It was rather the means employed by the Lord to visit Egypt, and there to operate the wonders of which the Prophets had spoken, Isaiah, in particular, ch. xix. 1: "*The Lord will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence*," *etc.* But we will not here pursue this point.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, continuing their journey, arrived at the inhabited portion of Egypt, and before reaching Heliopolis, where they were to sojourn, the angels led them through many other places. From this cause they employed more than fifty days in the journey, passing over two hundred leagues, although they might have arrived much sooner at Heliopolis if they had followed the direct road.

The Egyptians were strongly inclined to idolatry and superstition, and idols were placed every where. There were many temples where devils made their abode, and they were so given to the worship of demons, and so blinded by their delusions, that nothing short of the omnipotent arm of the Lord had power to reform this misguided country. Now, the Infant Jesus, with His Mother and St. Joseph, entered the habitations of the Egyptians. And when He entered, in the arms of the august Mary, raising His eyes towards heaven, and joining His hands, He prayed for the salvation of the poor people enslaved by the devil. Then exercising His power over these evil spirits, He precipitated them into the abyss. The idols fell at the same moment with a loud noise, the temples sank into ruins, and the altars were overthrown.

The cause of these prodigies was known to our Lady, who united her prayers to those of her Divine Son. St. Joseph also discovered that all these wonders proceeded from the Incarnate Word, and, filled with holy admiration, he praised and blessed Him. The demons failed to discover the cause. The Egyptians were amazed, although the most learned still preserved certain traditions of prophesies of Jeremiah, when he

was in Egypt, that a King of the Jews should come into their kingdom, and the temples of their idols should be destroyed.

In their trouble, some of the people came to visit our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, and discoursed with them on the ruin of their temples. The Queen of Wisdom availed herself of the occasion to instruct them. Her words were so sweet and so forcible, that the rumor of the arrival of our holy travellers was extended. Jesus and Mary passed through many towns of Egypt, chasing the demons not only from the temples, but from the bodies of the people. Our Princess and St. Joseph instructed many persons in the path to virtue and to eternal life.

They arrived at Heliopolis. Many idols were possessed by demons of great power, particularly one which abode in a tree at the entrance of the city. When the Word made man passed it, the demon was precipitated into the depths of the abyss, and the tree bowed itself to the earth. Several authors have recorded this miracle, for the leaves and fruits of this same tree, afterwards, cured many maladies.

Various writers have recorded this sojourn of the holy family in Egypt. Some mention their residence in one city, some in another. All may be true in referring to different epochs, for the

holy family were at Hermopolis, Memphis, Mataria, and other towns, but they fixed their abode at Heliopolis, because the angels had said to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph, that they were to stop at this place. Thus this city of the sun, according to its name saw the Son of Justice and of Grace.

Immediately upon their arrival, St. Joseph sought a lodging, offering a fair price. The Lord guided him to a poor habitation, a little out of the town, as the Queen of Heaven had wished, and they took possession of it at once. On entering it with her Son and St. Joseph, our blessed Lady prostrated herself and kissed the earth with profound humility. She then began the lowly task of cleansing her humble abode, and, so indigent were their circumstances, that she was obliged to borrow the broom with which she swept the house.

Although our holy strangers were content to be lodged within the bare walls of this poor tenement, food and furniture were still wanting. The miraculous succor, which they had been accustomed to receive by the ministry of angels, had ceased since they had entered inhabited regions. The Lord placed them at the table of the poorest poor, which is to have recourse to alms; and, while suffering from hunger, St. Jo

seph went to ask for food for the Son of God. By this example he teaches the poor never to complain of their wants, nor to be ashamed to beg, when all other legitimate means have failed, since it was necessary to beg at so early a period to support the life of the Lord of all created things. During the three first days, after their arrival at Heliopolis, our blessed Lady had no other aliment for herself and her adorable Son than that which St. Joseph received as alms, nor until he began to gain something by his labor. (The same thing happened in divers places of Egypt.) Having received payment for certain work, he made a little bedstead, entirely of wood, for the Mother, and a cradle for the Infant. For himself he prepared no other bed than the earth. Nor was there any furniture in the house, until, by the sweat of his brow, he acquired money to purchase some indispensable articles.

In this extreme poverty, Mary and Joseph never spoke of their house at Nazareth, nor of their parents and friends, nor of the presents of the wise men. They regretted none of those things, and supported their indigence without uttering the least complaint—without dwelling on the past, without fear of the future. On the contrary, they were always joyous—abandoning

themselves entirely to Divine Providence in the hour of their greatest need.

Oh, the baseness of our infidel hearts! With how many troubles, cares and pains are they not possessed, at the smallest inconveniences! The example of our blessed strangers should serve as a grave rebuke for our pusillanimity in times of trial and affliction. Our prudent Lady and her spouse, deprived of all temporal goods, lodged, with joy, in their destitute habitation. Of the three chambers that it contained, one was consecrated as a sanctuary for the Infant Jesus and His most holy Mother. In it were placed the cradle and her little bed. The second was appropriated to St. Joseph for prayer and repose, and the third served as a shop, where he worked at his trade. Our august Lady, seeing their extreme indigence, and that her spouse was obliged to increase his ordinary toil to enable them to subsist, resolved to aid him by her own labor. She judged it best to employ the day in work, so as to gain what was necessary for their food, for the clothing of St. Joseph, and to furnish their house, reserving only the night for her spiritual exercises. The Infant God approved this prudent decision of His Mother, and regulated the order of her life and her manual labor. But when the holy Mother saw that it was time

to relieve St. Joseph, by procuring for him the society of her Son, she said to Him: "My Son and my Lord, regard your faithful servant with the love of son and father." And, addressing the saint: "Receive, my spouse, within your arms, the Lord, who holds within His hands the heavens and earth, and who will sweeten the fatigues of your toil."

The saint was accustomed to receive this favor with great humility and gratitude, asking his holy spouse if he might take the liberty to caress the Infant. Reassured by the prudent Lady, the consolation he received in these caresses made him forget all his pains, so that they seemed easy and most sweet. When the holy spouses took their repast, the Blessed Virgin held the Infant. Having placed whatever was necessary on the table, she took Him again from the arms of St. Joseph. All that I can say of any thing that our saints did, is, that they were the admiration of the angels, and that they were according to the good pleasure of the Lord. When Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would enter Egypt on a light cloud, to make His wonders shine there, by this cloud, he meant His most holy Mother. After the Son of Justice had enlightened Egypt, and the cloud, free from every taint of sin, the august Mary, had fer

ilized it, this land brought forth abundant fruits during many ages, as we have seen in the great number of saints and anchorites whom, in the sequel, it produced.

The Lord sojourned at Heliopolis, and when He entered the temples, the idols and altars were overthrown, with a frightful noise. The whole city was in the greatest terror, and many persons of both sexes went to visit the strangers, and spoke of it to our blessed Lady and St. Joseph. Our blessed Mother conversed with them with much prudence, wisdom and sweetness. She withdrew them from their errors, and, at the same time, healed some diseased persons. The rumor of these miracles spread abroad to such a degree that our blessed Lady, seeing herself approached by multitudes of people, inquired of her divine Son what He would have her to do. The Infant God replied, that she should impart to them the knowledge of the true God, and instruct them in His worship and of the means to put away their sins.

The blessings which these souls thus obtained were so abundant that it would require many volumes to record the wonders that were manifested during these seven years. Two years later, St. Joseph also began to heal the sick. Our blessed Lady devoted herself chiefly to the

cure of women; she herself dressed their wounds; but for men, she healed them by her words only.

During the period of their sojourn, Heliopolis was infected by the plague. This misfortune, and the report of the wonders which they wrought, brought them great numbers of sick people, who went away healed in body and soul. But the Lord, wishing to extend His grace, determined, on the request of our Blessed Lady, that St. Joseph should instruct and cure the sick. And she obtained for him a new interior light, and a singular grace of holiness for the exercise of this ministry, so that, in the third year after their arrival, St. Joseph began the exercise of these gifts from heaven. He usually instructed and cured the men, and our Blessed Lady the women. We can easily conceive the good they wrought, but it is impossible to give the details of it.

King Herod was much disappointed when he heard that the Magi had visited Bethlehem—had seen the august Mary and St. Joseph, and had already left Palestine. He was also informed of what had passed in the temple. He then gave orders to make a strict search for our Queen, her Infant, and St. Joseph. But the Lord, who had commanded their departure from Jerusalem

by night, concealed their journey. And now it was that the demon inspired Herod to murder all the children of that region who were under two years old.

Herod promulgated this diabolical command in the sixth month after the birth of our Redeemer. Her most sweet Son, and the august Mother prayed to the Almighty for the holy innocents. The Divine Providence was most gracious towards these infant martyrs, and they all received, some more, some less, the use of reason, and a sublime knowledge of the being of God. They exercised heroic acts of faith, adoration, respect, and love of God. They willingly received martyrdom, and the angels who assisted them bore their souls to Limbo.

St. Mary's Convent

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INFANT JESUS SPEAKS TO ST. JOSEPH A YEAR AFTER HIS BIRTH.—ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF THE MOST HIGH, THE HOLY FAMILY RETURN FROM EGYPT TO NAZARETH.

ONE day, while the Blessed Mary and St. Joseph discoursed together upon the mysteries of the Lord, the Infant Jesus, having completed his first year, desired to break silence, and to speak, in a distinct voice, with His faithful foster-father. The two spouses spoke of the Infinite Being of God, and His goodness in sending His only Son to be the Master and Redeemer of men—to converse with them, and suffer the pains which their depraved nature had deserved.

St. Joseph, in this meditation, admired the works of the Lord, and redoubled his grateful thanksgivings for His love. The Infant God, who was in the arms of His Mother, used them as a pulpit, from which He thus addressed the saint: "MY FATHER, I am come from heaven

to be the light of the world, and, as a good shepherd, to seek and to know my sheep, and to give them the food of eternal life. I desire that you may both become children of the light, ince you are so near to its source." These words of the Infant Jesus, full of life and force, poured into the heart of the holy patriarch a new love—a profound respect—an inexpressible joy. He cast himself at the feet of the Infant God and offered devout thanks that the first word which he had heard Him pronounce was *father*. With many tears, he prayed his Divine Majesty to illuminate him with celestial light, to enable him to do whatsoever should be most agreeable to Him, and to thank Him for the manifold blessings that he had received from His liberal hand.

Fathers, who naturally love their children, feel great consolation when they perceive that they give promise of becoming wise and distinguished in the world; and even when they are not so, their natural affection induces them to praise whatever their children may say or do. Now, although St. Joseph was not the real father of the Infant, but only His foster-father, the love which he bore Him surpassed, beyond comparison, all that fathers have ever had for their children; because grace, and even nature,

were more powerful in him than in others, or in all fathers united. It is, therefore, by this love, and by the delight he felt in being the reputed father of the Infant Jesus, that we are to measure the joy of his pure soul, when he heard the Son of the Eternal Father call him *father*, in beginning to speak with him so graciously.

This first year having been passed in swaddling clothes, the prudent Mother judged the time had come when He should be put upon His feet. The Infant Jesus said to her: "My Mother, you will clothe me in a long tunic, of a plain color. I will wear none but this. It shall grow with me, and it shall be for this that they will cast lots after my death. I ought to have only one coat in this world, in order to instruct men to esteem and to love poverty. I consent that you give me some common sandals, which I will wear until the time comes for my public preaching, when I must go barefooted." The Queen of Heaven employed herself immediately to accomplish the will of her most holy Son. She provided wool of the natural color, of which she spun and made a little tunic, all of one piece. She wove it on a frame. There was a mystery in making this tunic without seam. On the prayer of our Blessed Lady, it

changed its natural hue into another, which was between violet and silver color, very perfect, so that the shade could not be distinguished. Besides this, she made a half tunic of linen, for an under garment, in which He was crucified. The holy Mother, having thus clothed the Infant Jesus, put sandals upon Him, and set Him on His feet. The tunic proved to be exactly fitted to Him, and He never quitted it until the executioners despoiled Him of His clothing, to flagellate and crucify Him, because it grew with His sacred body as much as was necessary. The same thing happened with the sandals, and the other tunic, which served as drawers. The Infant Jesus found himself afoot. There appeared in Him a grace quite wonderful, for He surpassed, in beauty, all the children of men. The angels were surprised that He had chosen so humble a vestment.

Our Blessed Lady and her holy spouse were filled with joy on seeing their Infant walk with so much grace, and possessing such rare beauty. When He had reached eighteen months, He was weaned—afterwards He ate meat, but always very sparely. When He was grown up, He took His food at the same hour with our blessed spouses, and nothing more; and when at the table with His parents, they waited always for Him to give the

benediction at the commencement, and to return thanks at the close of the repast.

The Infant Jesus grew in the admiration of all who knew Him. Having attained His sixth year, He began, sometimes, to go out to visit the sick in the hospitals. From every quarter they came to felicitate and bless the parents for having such a Child. Many children of Heliopolis, as is usual, accompanied our amiable Jesus. He instructed them in the knowledge of the Divinity and of the virtues, and taught them the way to eternal life.

This lovely and beautiful Child, in proportion as He advanced in age, assumed a graver demeanor towards His parents; and some time after the swaddling clothes were laid aside, the most tender caresses, which had always been made with a certain reserve, ceased. The circumspection of His parents in this regard, arose from their perception in Him of so much of the majesty of the hidden Divinity, which, if He had not tempered it, would often have produced a fear so full of respect, that they could not have dared even to speak to Him. But His presence never ceased to inspire them with sentiments altogether divine and ineffable.

In this majestic grandeur, He was dutiful towards His most holy Mother, and treated

St. Joseph as the one who held the name and office of His father, obeying both as their humble Child. It is impossible to enumerate the souls who were converted and saved in Heliopolis, and in all Egypt—the sick whom they cured, and the wonders they wrought, in the seven years of their abode there. During this time the Infant Jesus attained the age of seven years, and this was the term of that mysterious exile which the Eternal Wisdom had fixed. To fulfil the prophecies, it was necessary that He should return to Nazareth. The Eternal Father, one day, declared His will to the humanity of His divine Son, in the presence of His holy Mother. The Son and the Mother disclosed nothing of the new order from heaven to St. Joseph, but the angel of the Lord appeared to him the same night in a dream, as it is related by St. Matthew, and instructed him "to take the Child and His Mother, and return to the land of Israel." The Most High so eminently esteems good order, that the Infant Jesus being God, and His Mother so superior in sanctity to St. Joseph, nevertheless He would not that the undertaking of the return to Galilee should depend either upon the Son or the Mother, but that it should be conducted by St. Joseph, who filled the office of head to this divine family. This example

teaches to all mortals how agreeable it is to God, that they who are inferiors in the mystical body, although more worthy by other qualities, should obey and submit themselves to those who, by their office, are their superiors.

St. Joseph went instantly to communicate the commandment of the Lord to the Infant Jesus and His Mother, who replied, "that the will of the heavenly Father should be executed." Upon which they prepared with all possible diligence for their departure. They distributed among the poor the little furniture they possessed, and this was done by the agency of the Infant God.

They left Heliopolis for Palestine, with the same angels who had accompanied them to Egypt. Our Queen rode a little ass, with the Infant God in her lap, and St. Joseph walked near them. All their acquaintances felt sensibly their departure, and took leave of them with many tears. They passed several of the inhabited places of Egypt before arriving at the desert, and left every where marks of their charity. They cured many sick persons, and chased away a multitude of demons, who knew not by what power they were precipitated into the abyss.

I will not pause to record the various circum-

stances that attended the Infant Jesus and His Blessed Mother in their departure from Egypt. It may suffice to say, that they who approached them with any pious affection were enlightened in the truth, assisted by grace, and penetrated by divine love. At length, our holy travellers left behind them the inhabited country, and entered the desert by which they had come. There they again suffered discomforts similar to those they had endured after leaving Palestine. In these extremities the Lord himself provided for them by the ministry of the angels. Sometimes the Infant Jesus ordered these spirits to bring food for His holy Mother and her spouse.

This consoled the holy Patriarch, seeing that he was altogether unable of himself to find support for the King and Queen of Heaven. On other occasions the Infant God exercised His divine power in multiplying some morsel of bread into as much as they had need of. For the rest, this journey passed off as the preceding one. But when, on approaching Palestine, the cautious St. Joseph heard that Archelaus reigned in Judea, in the place of Herod, his father, he took another road, without entering Judea, and they came to Nazareth, their country, because the Infant was to be called a *Nazarene*. There they found their old abode, under the guardian-

ship of that pious woman, the relative of St. Joseph, to whom he had written on their departure for Egypt, requesting her to take charge of it and whatever it contained: and they found all in good condition.

When our Blessed Lady had entered it with her divine Son and holy spouse, she prostrated herself to render thanks. The happy Mother then regulated her affairs according to the intentions of the Infant God, and St. Joseph did the same, in whatever regarded his employment for the support of the Infant, the Mother and himself. The happiness of the holy Patriarch was immense; for it was a favor and an unutterable joy to have been chosen to gain by the labor of his hands wherewithal to sustain the Infant God and His Mother, to whom belonged heaven, earth, and all that they contain.

The Queen of Heaven desired to requite the labors of the saint. She served him and prepared his simple food with the most affectionate gratitude, and, obeying him in all things, she regarded herself more as his servant than his spouse. She considered herself unworthy that even the earth should sustain her, and she established her rare humility on such solid foundations, that she was always plunged in an abyss of annihilation, and still lower in her own esteem.

CHAPTER XV.

SOJOURN AT NAZARETH.—THE BLESSED MARY AND ST. JOSEPH GO EVERY YEAR TO JERUSALEM.—AT THE AGE OF TWELVE, JESUS REMAINS AT THE TEMPLE, WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS PARENTS.

JESUS, Mary and Joseph, had finally reached Nazareth, and their poor dwelling was changed into a new heaven. If it were necessary to relate all the wonders that happened there before the Infant God had reached His twelfth year, many volumes would be required.

Soon after their return to Nazareth, the Lord tried His most Blessed Mother. The Most High determined that our holy Lady should be the first disciple of her Son. The Incarnate Word and His Blessed Mother occupied themselves in hese profound mysteries during the twenty-three years of their abode at Nazareth. The Lord caused her to feel internally His absence. Besides this, the Infant God, without making known any cause for it, was more grave than ordinary. We omit here many admirable things, that we may not withdraw ourselves too much

from the life of our holy Patriarch. The prudent Mother never neglected any thing that regarded the corporeal service of her Son, taking great care of His diet as well as that of St. Joseph. She also obtained that the Infant Jesus consoled His foster-father by His presence, as much as if he had been His natural father.

The Infant God obeyed His Mother, and was often with St. Joseph while at his work in which he was continually occupied, so that thus by the sweat of his brow, he might maintain those so dear to him. In proportion as He grew in stature, He aided the holy Patriarch, so far as it was possible at His age, and sometimes He wrought miracles to produce results which surpassed His natural strength, thereby to relieve the saint of his labor; but these marvels occurred only in the presence of the three.

Some time after the return of our saints to Nazareth, the period arrived when the precept of the law of Moses obliged the Israelites to appear before the Lord at Jerusalem. This commandment was obligatory three times a year, but it was binding only on the men—women might present themselves for devotion, at their choice. Our Blessed Lady conferred with her spouse as to what they should do on this occasion. The saint wished to conduct thither

the Queen of Heaven and her holy Child, to offer them anew to the Eternal Father. The holy Mother was inclined to go from devotion, but she undertook nothing without the consent of her Master, the Incarnate Word. Having consulted Him, it was resolved that St. Joseph should present himself there alone, twice in the year, and the third time they should all go together. It was at the festival of the Passover that the sweet Jesus and His Blessed Mother accompanied St. Joseph. When he went alone, the saint made the journey on behalf of all, and, as deputy for the Son and the Mother, (who prayed for him at Nazareth,) he made mysterious prayers in the temple at Jerusalem, offering the sacrifice of his lips. And as he offered there Jesus and Mary, this offering was more agreeable to the Eternal Father than any which all the rest of the people of Israel could offer.

When the Incarnate Word and the Virgin Mary accompanied St. Joseph to the festival of the Passover, this pilgrimage was more admirable for him, because the ten thousand angels accompanied our divine travellers. They made short journeys on these occasions, because, after the return from Egypt, the Infant Jesus desired to go on foot, which obliged them to move slowly. The first time they travelled in this manner, our

Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, were careful to assist Him, by taking Him sometimes in their arms, but afterwards He went entirely on foot. The prudent Mother offered no opposition, but led Him by the hand, and the glorious Patriarch sometimes enjoyed this consolation.

Every time the Son and the Mother made this journey, they operated wonders for the good of souls. When they stopped for the night, in some hostelry, the Infant God and His Mother were never separated. She often saw Him engaged in prayer for the whole human race, and united her prayers to His. Many times, as in a mirror, she beheld all the affronts, all the ignominy, and all the sufferings which her most sweet Child would suffer in the City of Jerusalem, and she was transpierced by the sword of grief which Simeon had predicted. But the Infant God, to alleviate her sorrow, prayed her to offer these pains, which regarded them mutually, for the salvation of men.

Our holy family, as I have said, continued to go every year to the temple, to celebrate the Passover. The Infant God had attained His twelfth year, the epoch at which He was to make manifest the splendors of His inaccessible light. Our holy pilgrims remained an entire week at Jerusalem. The happy Mother and St. Joseph received,

each in proportion to their dispositions, such great favors from the liberal hand of the Lord, that the human understanding is not able to conceive them.

The seventh day past, they took the road towards Nazareth. But as they issued forth from the City of Jerusalem, the Infant God left His parents unperceived, and remained behind, while they pursued their journey, not knowing what had happened. The Lord availed himself of the customs of the people; for the troops of strangers divided themselves, and, for the better preservation of propriety, the women went together. The children accompanied, indifferently, their father or their mother. St. Joseph had reason to believe that the Child Jesus went with His Blessed Mother, nor could he imagine that she would have set out without Him. Our Blessed Lady had less strong reasons to persuade herself that our adorable Saviour was with the Patriarch St. Joseph, but the Lord diverted her mind by other divine thoughts at the beginning, so that when she found herself alone without her best beloved, she believed that the glorious St. Joseph had taken Him with him, and that the Supreme Lord had willed to grant him this consolation.

Our holy spouses travelled on with this idea

throughout the day, as St. Luke informs us, and, having left the city by different gates, rejoined each other afterwards. The holy Mary and her spouse met at the place where they were to pass the first night after their departure from Jerusalem. But our Blessed Lady, seeing that the Infant God was not with St. Joseph, as she supposed, and the holy patriarch not finding Him with His Mother, both were thrown into such consternation that they nearly lost the power of speech, and remained some time without uttering a word. Both, from humility, attributed the fault to themselves, of allowing Him to be separated, by their want of care for the divine Infant. Recovering a little from their amazement, they conferred together, in extreme grief, respecting what was to be done. The tender Mother spoke first: "My spouse, my heart can find no repose, unless we go at once to seek my holy Child." They instantly commenced their researches, by inquiries among their relatives and acquaintances, but none could give them tidings of Him, nor mitigate their sorrow; on the contrary, it was augmented, for no one had seen Him since they had come out of Jerusalem.

The Mother of Wisdom formed various conjectures in her mind, and the first thought was, that Archelaus, having had some knowledge of

the Infant Jesus, might have caused Him to be apprehended. She feared that He had been cast into prison and maltreated. Her deep humility induced her, also, to fear that, unhappily, her services might not have been pleasing to Him. This innocent Dove passed the three days, during which she sought the Saviour, in tears and groanings, without repose—without food or sleep. The celestial spirits of her guard were not ignorant of where He was, but she was so reserved and so humble, that she did not inquire of them where she could find Him.

The grief of our Blessed Lady on this occasion surpassed all that all the martyrs united have suffered; and in it she exercised a patience and resignation unparalleled. For, O! prodigy of holiness—of prudence — of perfection! in such an unheard-of affliction, and in such absorbing sorrow, she was neither troubled, nor lost her interior nor exterior peace—she gave way to no movement of impatience, nor of disordered tenderness. She sought for her Child with a divine wisdom, inquiring of many persons if they had not seen Him, and giving marks by which He might be recognized. Among others, a woman replied to her inquiries: "A child, having the same features that you describe, presented himself yesterday at my door, asking

alms, which I gave him. His charming manners and exceeding beauty won my heart." These were the first tidings the afflicted Mother had obtained of her Son in Jerusalem, and she forthwith proceeded to the hospital of the city, hoping to find the Master of poverty among the poor, where she was informed that the child she described had visited them during three days, bringing them alms, and had left them much consoled in their afflictions. Having failed to find Him among the poor, she doubted not that He would be in the temple. The holy angels now said to her: "Queen of the universe, you will soon behold the light of your eyes. Hasten to the temple." The glorious patriarch, St. Joseph, advanced towards her at this moment, for, to gain time, he had sought for the Infant God in another direction, and he also had been directed, by an angel, to the temple.

He suffered extremely from fatigue during these three days, going sometimes in one direction, sometimes in another, occasionally with his blessed spouse, oftener alone, and always with inconceivable care and solicitude; for his life would have been endangered if the hand of the Lord had not sustained him, and if our precious Lady had not taken care to alleviate his extreme

affliction, besides obliging him to take some little food and rest. The tender and devoted love which he cherished for the Infant God imparted such an exceeding desire to find Him, that he forgot all besides. Following the counsel of the celestial princes, our holy spouses hastened to the temple. In the next chapter we shall relate what happened there.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE AUGUST MARY AND ST. JOSEPH DISCOVER THE INFANT IN THE TEMPLE AMONG THE DOCTORS.—RETURN TO NAZARETH.

OUR Blessed Lady, ever so assiduous in the service of her Divine Son, had, nevertheless, lost sight of Him, and left Him to wander away from her at Jerusalem. Although it might suffice to say that the same Lord so ordained it, we may also perceive how this separation was effected. It is certain that, besides taking advantage of the multitudes of people, the Infant God used, also, supernatural means, and while the men and women were separating from each other, the omipotent Lord gave to His Blessed Mother an intellectual vision, which so possessed all her faculties, and so elevated her above things of sense, that she was unable to do more than mechanically to follow the path she travelled. St. Joseph had the reasons we have already adverted to, but he, also, was

elevated to a most sublime contemplation, which induced a more ready acquiescence in the idea that the Infant had accompanied His Mother, and by this means the adorable Child separated himself from His parents and remained at Jerusalem. He withdrew himself when near the gates of the city, and, returning, he traversed the streets, meditating, by His divine science, on the events of the future, and offering himself to His Father for the salvation of souls.

In order to inaugurate the honor of humble mendicity, as the eldest son of holy poverty, He employed three days in asking alms. He visited the hospitals, consoled all the poor whom He found there, and shared with them the alms He had received. He secretly restored to several sick persons health of body, and to many that of the soul. He wrought these miracles in favor of some who had showed Him kindness, wishing to accomplish, in advance, the promise that He would afterwards make to His Church.

Having occupied himself with these and many other works, according to the will of God, He went to the temple, where, on the day mentioned by St. Luke, the Rabbis, or doctors of the law, were assembled in an apartment, where they disputed whether the Messiah was not already

born. They were installed in their seats with that authority which usually accompanies those who pass for learned men. The Infant Jesus approached the assembly. The opinions of the doctors upon this subject were widely different, for some asserted the fact, while others denied it; and those who supported the negative, alleged the testimony of the Scriptures and the prophecies, understood by them in the gross manner which the Apostle speaks of. Now, these sages, as they deemed themselves, advanced the opinion that the Messiah ought to come with all the majesty and pomp of a monarch, but, as yet, they saw no indications of this power and liberty.

The Master of Truth, Jesus, perceived that the discussion was about to terminate in this error, for, although there were men who held the contrary opinion, their number was small. His immense charity could not endure this ignorance of His works, and their sublime ends, in these interpreters of the law. The Infant God drew nearer. He entered into the midst of the assembly with admirable majesty and beauty, and excited in these doctors the desire to hear Him with attention.

He opened His discourse, saying: "I have heard all that has been said touching the coming

of the Messiah, and the conclusion respecting it. In offering an objection to this decision, I pre-suppose what the prophets have said, viz.: That His coming should be with great power, and with glorious majesty; for Isaiah declares that He shall be our legislator, our king, who shall save His people. Daniel assures us that all tribes and all people shall serve Him. The Scriptures are filled with similar promises. But my doubt is founded on these passages and divers others. The same Isaiah says that He shall be satiated with opprobrium, and led like a sheep to the slaughter. Jeremiah tells us that His enemies should assemble to erase His name from the land of the living; and David, that He would be the refuse of the people. How will it be possible to harmonize these prophecies? We cannot deny that the Messiah must come twice—the first time, to redeem the world; the second, to judge it. The prophecies should, then, be applied to these two events, giving to each what belongs to it. Following these observations, if we conclude that the first advent will be with power and majesty, this must not be understood in a material sense, but of a new spiritual kingdom. And with this just interpretation, all the Scriptures, which cannot be harmonized in any other sense, will be found uniform."

To these the Infant God joined many other reasons. The scribes and doctors, who had listened to Him, remained silent. At length, "What wonder is this?" said they. "Whence comes this marvellous child?" The august Mary and St. Joseph arrived in time to hear the conclusion of the discourse. The doctors of the law arose, and our Blessed Lady, overwhelmed with joy to have found her treasure, approached her Divine Child, and said, as it is related by St. Luke: "*Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee, sorrowing.*" His Majesty replied to her: "*How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*"

The Evangelist relates that the Blessed Mary and St. Joseph did not understand the mystery of these words. It was because of their interior joy, which they had sowed in tears. The prudent Mother said to her divine Son: "Do not separate me from your presence. Receive me for your servant, and if through my own fault I have lost you, I entreat your pardon." The Infant God received her with complaisance, and they again set out for Nazareth. After they had gone a short distance from Jerusalem, our Blessed Lady prostrating herself, adored her holy Son, and asked His benediction. The Divine

Jesus raised her from the ground, and spoke to her with great sweetness. Afterwards He lifted the veil, and, with greater clearness than ever before, revealed to her His most holy soul and its operations.

The blessed Mother conversed with her most sweet Child, respecting the mysteries that He had opened to her. The celestial Master informed her that these doctors and scribes knew not that His majesty was the Messiah, because of their presumption and confidence in their own wisdom. Our Redeemer converted many souls during this journey, and, as His holy Mother was present, He made her the instrument of these miracles. He restored many sick persons to health, He comforted the afflicted, and wrought other wonders which I do not pause to recount.

They arrived at Nazareth. The Evangelist St. Luke includes, in a few brief words, the mysteries of their history: "*The Infant Jesus was subject to His parents*," i. e., to His holy Mother and St. Joseph. "*His Mother kept all these words in her heart*, and *Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and man.*" We shall speak of this further on, adding, only, at this time, that the humility and obedience of our Lord towards His parents, offered new sub-

jects of admiration to the angels, as did also the dignity of his pure Mother, to whom the God Incarnate was confided, in order that, by the help of St. Joseph, she might minister to His wants.

Although the obedience of the Son was only a consequence of the natural maternity, still, to exercise the rights of a Mother over her Son, a different grace was necessary from that which she had received to conceive and bring Him forth. The august Mary possessed all these needful graces, proportioned to this ministry and office, and with such abundance, that they were reflected upon her happy spouse, so that he was also the worthy foster-father of Jesus Christ, and head of this most holy family.

CHAPTER XVII.

ST. JOSEPH IS NO LONGER ABLE TO WORK.—CONDUCT OF THE AUGUST MARY AND THE DIVINE JESUS, DURING MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS THAT THE HOLY PATRIARCH LIVED IN SICKNESS AND INFIRMITIES.

THE Queen of Heaven completed her thirty-third year, and her chaste form retained all its natural perfections so beautifully and well proportioned, that it was the admiration of the angelic choirs. Her sacred body had reached its full development, so that this august Princess resembled the holy humanity of her Son. The pure Mary preserved this admirable complexion at thirty-three, without the least change, and at the age of seventy, she had lost nothing of her strength and beauty. Our blessed Lady understood this privilege. She knew that the resemblance of the humanity of her divine Son was to be always preserved in her. St. Joseph was not aged when this lovely Queen had attained her thirty-third year, nevertheless his strength was much exhausted, because the cares, travels,

and continued pains he had taken for the support of his spouse and the Lord of the Universe, had worn upon his health more than his years. The Lord, who desired to advance him in the exercise of patience and the other virtues, permitted him to suffer from certain maladies, that hindered him much from application to manual labor. His prudent spouse, who had always appreciated, loved and served him beyond all that other women have done in regard to their husbands, perceiving his indisposition, said to him, "My spouse, I am under extreme obligations for your fidelity, and the increasing care and fatigue you have imposed upon yourself, in order, by the sweat of your brow, to maintain me, your servant, and my adorable Son. You will receive from the liberal hand of the Most High the recompense for your pains, and the precious benedictions which you have merited. I beg you to cease from this incessant labor, and repose yourself. I will now labor for you, in testimony of my gratitude, as long as the Lord shall give us life."

The saint listened to the reasonings of his sweet spouse with many tears; and, although he assured her that he desired to continue his toil, he yielded to her solicitations, believing it his duty to obey her, and discontinued his labors.

In order to have nothing superfluous in this holy family, they gave away his tools in alms.

St. Joseph being thus relieved from labor, gave himself entirely for the rest of his days to the contemplation of the mysteries which he had nourished in his breast, and to the practice of virtue. He was happy in these occupations to find himself in the presence and enjoyment of the conversation of the Incarnate Wisdom and of her who was His Mother. With such helps, he arrived at so high a degree of sanctity, that next to his blessed spouse, who was always unique among mere creatures, *he surpassed all men, and he will never be surpassed by any.**

Our august Queen and her divine Son assisted, served, and consoled him in his maladies, with the most assiduous care. It is impossible to depict the humility, respect, and love which these charitable cares produced in the sincere and grateful heart of the servant of God. The Blessed Virgin charged herself with the support of her most holy Son and her spouse, by her own work. The Eternal Wisdom so disposed it, in order that her merits and virtues might reach the highest degree, and serve as an example to put to shame the children of Adam.

The Lord offers this *strong woman* to us as an

* Suarez maintains this same doctrine *ex professo*.

example. The heart of her husband trusteth in her, and not only that of her spouse Joseph, but also that of her Son, at once true God and man, as Solomon declares in the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs. Means were not wanting to the Lord to support the corporeal life of His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, since man lives not by bread alone. He could have miraculously provided for them every day, but the world would have been deprived of the privilege of witnessing the industry of the most pure Mother of God, and if our Blessed Lady had not acquired these merits, she would have failed to obtain much of her reward.

With prudent diligence she provided for all. Neither our adorable Saviour nor His Mother, ate flesh meat—their food consisted of fish, fruits, and herbs, and they partook of these with great moderation. Our august Lady, nevertheless, prepared meat for St. Joseph, and served it in the manner most agreeable to him. It happened sometimes, that her labor was insufficient, because St. Joseph had need of more than heretofore. On these occasions, our Lord exercised His power. He often so ordered that His Blessed Mother accomplished much in a short time, so that her work multiplied itself in her hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE CARE WHICH THE AUGUST MARY AND THE DIVINE JESUS BESTOWED UPON ST. JOSEPH IN THE INFIRMITIES OF HIS LATTER DAYS.

IT is a common mistake to regard the Lord Jesus only as Redeemer, and not as a master, who by His example instructs us to suffer afflictions. And, although Catholics do not fall into the insensate errors of the heretics, for they all admit that without good works, and without afflictions, there is neither recompense nor crown, yet we find many children of the Holy Church who are scarcely to be distinguished from those who are in darkness, since they avoid works which are painful to them.

Let us reject this manifest error, and let us be assured that sufferings have not been for our Lord Jesus Christ alone, but for us also. The most beloved of our divine Master have received the greatest share of the cross. Let us not be so bold as to say, that if the Saviour suffered as man, He is, at the same time, God, and hence

His is, so human weakness, rather a subject for admiration than of imitation. The Saviour of our souls overturns this excuse by the example of His most innocent Mother and St. Joseph, and that of many men and feeble women also.

The Lord conducted, by this royal road of suffering, the spouse of His blessed Mother, St. Joseph, whom His Majesty loved above all the children of men. To increase his merits and his crown, before his power of gaining merits had ceased, the Lord bestowed on him, in the last years of his life, certain exceedingly acute maladies, which caused excessive pain throughout his body, and great debility. Besides these, there was another mode of suffering, more gentle, yet very distinct, which resulted from the force of his burning love. This love was so vehement, and at times his transports were so impetuous, that his pure spirit must have broken the chains that bound it to the body, if the same Lord had not given him the power of resisting it. His Majesty made him suffer this sweet violence, because, from the natural feebleness of a body so attenuated, this painful exercise was a great merit for the saint, not only from the effects of the pain that he suffered, but from the cause, which was love; hence he

acquired incomparable merits. Our blessed Lady had knowledge of all these mysteries. She penetrated the interior of the saint, so that she might not be deprived of the joy she derived from the conviction of having a spouse so holy and so beloved of the Lord. She observed the candor and purity of his soul—his ardent affection, his lofty and divine thoughts, his patience and sweetness in his maladies, the great sufferings that he bore without a complaint or sigh, neither asking any solace. Our great patriarch supported all his pains with an incomparable patience and magnanimity. All this his faithful spouse remarked, as well as the value and the merits of the many virtues which the saint practised, and she conceived so high a reverence for him that we will not attempt to express it. She applied herself, with the greatest joy, to sustain and console him. As she had little esteem for what she did herself to relieve the great discomforts of her spouse, and because of the love she bore him, she commanded the viands that she prepared for her holy patient to give him strength and re-establish his appetite, since this was to preserve the life of the saint—the just—the elect of the Most High.

When St. Joseph partook of this food, he was sensible of the sweet benedictions and the genial

effects of the viands, and inquired of his spouse: "What aliments of life are these which vivify me, restoring my appetite and my strength, and fill me with new consolation?" The Queen of heaven served him on her knees, and, when his pains were violent, she removed his sandals, and supported and assisted him with the tenderest affection. Although the humble saint made every effort to hinder his spouse from taking such unwearied pains, it was always in vain, for our sweet Lady understood the maladies of her patient, and when he most needed help, and she therefore hastened to assist him, in all his wants, with the greatest affection. She often said things which exceedingly consoled him. During the three last years of his life, which were those of his greatest suffering, she never quitted him, day nor night. If for a moment she withdrew, it was only to serve her Divine Son, who united with His Mother to assist the holy patriarch, except when He was necessarily occupied in other works; so we may say that never was patient so well served. From hence we may learn how great were the happiness and the merits of St. Joseph, for he alone has merited to have her for his spouse, who was also the spouse of the Holy Spirit. The charity of our blessed Lady towards St.

Joseph was not satisfied by these services of which we have spoken. She strove to console him by still other means. Sometimes she prayed the Lord, with the most ardent charity, to deliver her spouse from his sufferings, and to inflict them upon herself. In making this request, she believed herself to deserve the pains of all creatures, regarding herself as the least of all. She alleged, also, the holiness of St. Joseph, and the delight which the Lord took in this heart, so conformed to that of His Majesty. She witnessed the sufferings of her blessed spouse, and had compassion for them: she knew his merits, and the pleasure which her adorable Son had in him. She rejoiced in the patience of the saint, and magnified the Lord. Sometimes, the Queen of Pity, touched by the excruciating pains of her spouse, and melted by tenderest sympathy, having obtained permission from her Divine Son, commanded His sufferings, and their natural causes, to suspend their activity, and cease so cruelly to afflict the just and the well-beloved of the Lord.

At other times, she prayed the saints and angels to console her spouse, and to strengthen him in his troubles, when the weakness of the fragile flesh demanded it. By this species of commandment, the blessed spirits appeared to the holy pa

tient in the human form, all radiant with beauty and splendor, and conversing with each other of God and His infinite perfections. Occasionally they chanted celestial music, with a sweetness tha suspended his bodily pains, and inflamed his pure soul with divine love. The man of God had, besides, for his greater consolation, a particular knowledge, not only of all these favors, but also of the holiness of his most holy spouse, of the love that she bore to him, of the interior charity with which she served him, and others of the excellences of this great Queen of the universe. All these united produced such effects upon St. Joseph, and enabled him to acquire so many merits, that, in this life, it is not possible to conceive them.*

* M. Olier, who has written such sublime pages on St. Joseph, affirms that we cannot know, here below, the merits of the glorious St. Joseph, and that we are incapable to conceive them. What a eulogy! —*Manuscripts of M. Olier.*

CHAPTER XIX.

PRECIOUS DEATH OF THE GLORIOUS ST. JOSEPH, CAUSED PRINCIPALLY BY DIVINE LOVE.—HE EXPIRES IN THE ARMS OF THE DIVINE JESUS, ASSISTED BY HIS BLESSED SPOUSE, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

DURING eight years St. Joseph had been exercised by pain and sufferings, and his generous spirit was ever more and more purified in the crucible of patience and divine love. With years his tortures increased, his strength diminished. The inevitable term of life, to which we pay the universal tribute of death, approached. His blessed spouse increased her devotion and her cares to serve him with inviolable fidelity.

This most holy Lady, knowing, through her infused science that the last hour of her chaste spouse in this place of exile was very near, went to find her adorable Son, and said to Him: "My Lord and my God, the time for the death of your servant Joseph, which you have determined by an eternal will, approaches. I beseech

you, Lord, by your infinite goodness, to assist him in this hour, so that his death may be as precious to you, as his life has been agreeable. Remember my Son, the love and humility of your servant—his merits—his virtues, and the pains he has taken to preserve your life and mine."

Our Saviour replied to her: "My Mother, your requests are pleasing to me, and the merits of Joseph are in my thoughts. I will now assist him, and I will give him so eminent a place among the princes of my people, that it will be a subject of admiration for the angels, and a motive for praises to them and to men. I will not do for any nation that which I will do for your spouse." Our august Lady returned thanks to her most sweet Son for this promise.

During the nine days that preceded the death of St. Joseph, the Son and the Mother watched by him day and night. They so arranged it that one or the other was always with him. During these nine days, the angels chanted, three times each day, by the commandment of the Lord, celestial music for the holy patient. It was composed of canticles of praise to the Most High, and of benedictions for the saint himself; and, besides, so delicious a fragrance pervaded all of this poor habitation, that not only the man of

God was fortified and cheered by it, but many persons on the outside.

A day before his death, all inflamed with divine love for so many benefits, he was elevated into a sublime ecstasy, which continued twenty-four hours, the Lord preserving his strength and life by a miraculous interposition. In this ecstatic state he clearly beheld the Divine Essence, and discovered in it, without a veil, that which he had believed by faith, either in the incomprehensible Divinity, or in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption—the Church Militant and the sacraments with which she is enriched. The Holy Trinity destined him to be the precursor of our Saviour Jesus Christ to the saints who were in limbo, and commanded him to announce to them anew their redemption, and to prepare them for the visit which the same Lord was to make them to conduct them to eternal felicity. St. Joseph returned from this ecstasy radiant in beauty, his soul divinized from the view of the being of God. He addressed himself to his spouse, and requested her benediction; but she prayed her most holy Son to give it, which His Divine Majesty was pleased to do. Our Blessed Lady, having knelt, besought St. Joseph to bless her as her spouse and head. The man of God, not without a divine impulse, gave his benedic-

tion to his beloved spouse before their separation. She afterwards kissed the hand with which he had blessed her, and requested him to salute for her the saints in limbo.

The most humble Joseph, wishing to close his life by the seal of humility, asked pardon of his holy spouse for the faults which he might have committed in her service as a feeble man of earthly mould. He entreated her to assist him in this last hour, and to intercede for him. He testified, above all, his gratitude to our adorable Saviour, for the benefits that he had received from His most liberal hand during all his life, and particularly in this sickness. Then taking leave of his blessed spouse, he said to her: "You are blessed among all women, and chosen above all creatures. Let angels and men praise you. Let all nations know and exalt your dignity. Let the name of the Most High through you be known, adored, and glorified in all future ages, and eternally praised by all the blessed spirits, for having created you so pleasing in His eyes. I trust to meet you in the heavenly land."

After this, the man of God addressed our Lord Jesus Christ, and, wishing to speak to His Majesty with profound respect, he made every effort to kneel on the ground. But the sweet Jesus approaching, received him in His arms,

and the saint, supporting his head upon His bosom, said: "My Lord and my God, Son of the Eternal Father, Creator and Redeemer of the world, give Thine eternal benediction to Thy servant, who is the work of Thy hands. Pardon the faults I have committed in Thy service and in Thy company. I confess Thee, I glorify Thee, I render to Thee, with a contrite and humble heart, eternal thanks for having chosen me, by Thine ineffable goodness, from among men to be the spouse of Thine own Mother. Grant, Lord, that Thine own glory may be the theme of my gratitude through all eternity."

The Redeemer of the world gave him His benediction: "Rest in peace," He said; "the grace of my heavenly Father, and mine, be with thee. Proclaim the good tidings to my prophets and saints, who await thee in Paradise, and tell them that their redemption is nigh." As our beloved Redeemer pronounced these words, the most happy Joseph expired in His arms, and His Divine Majesty closed His eyes. The angels chanted the sweetest hymns of praise, and, by order of the supreme King, they conducted this most holy soul into Paradise, where the saints recognized him as the reputed father of the Redeemer of the world, and His greatly beloved one, who merited singular ven-

eration. He imparted a new joy to this innumerable assembly, by announcing to them, according to the commandment of the Lord, that their redemption would not long be delayed. We must not omit to mention, that although th. precious death of St. Joseph was preceded by so long a sickness, and such severe sufferings, these were not the chief causes of it. He might have lived longer, notwithstanding these maladies, if the effects of the ardent love that burned in his chaste bosom had not been superadded, for this happy death was rather a triumph of love than the penalty for sin. The Lord suspended the supernatural aid by which He had preserved the strength of His servant, and hindered the violence of his love from destroying him; and this help failing, nature was vanquished. This victory sundered the ties that detained his holy soul in the prison of the body, in which consists our death. Thus, love was the last of his maladies, and it was also the greatest and most glorious, since, by it, death is the sleep of the body, and the principle of life.

Our blessed Lady, seeing that her spouse had ceased to live, prepared his body for sepulture, according to the customary usages. No other hands than hers, and those of the angels who assisted her, touched him. In order that all

should be comformable to the incomparable modesty of the Virgin Mother, the Lord clothed the body of St. Joseph in a celestial splendor, which covered it in such a manner that the face only was visible, and thus the pure spouse saw not the rest of the body which she prepared for interment Several persons were attracted to the house by the sweet fragrance that exhaled from the holy corpse, and, seeing it so beautiful, and as flexible as if it had been living, they were greatly astonished.

The body of St. Joseph was carried to the common cemetery, followed by relatives, friends, and others, and by the Redeemer of the world and His holy Mother, and a great multitude of angels. Our prudent Lady preserved an unalterable dignity, nor did she permit her interior affliction to hinder her in ordering all things necessary for the interment of her spouse, or the service of her Son. She acquitted herself in all with a regal magnanimity, and, at the close, she gave thanks to her adorable Son for the favors He had bestowed on St. Joseph. Our august saint was one of those who enjoyed the privilege of exemption from the sight of the demons at his death, because these spirits of darkness, wishing to approach him, were sensible that a powerful force arrested them, and the angels hurled them into hell

CHAPTER XX.

PRIVILEGES GRANTED TO ST. JOSEPH.—HIS BIRTH ACCOMPANIED BY MIRACLES.—HIS ADMIRABLE VIRTUES.—THE VIRTUES WHICH THE MOST HIGH HAS PROMISED TO THOSE DEVOTED TO HIM.—JESUS RESUSCITATES ST. JOSEPH AFTER HIS PASSION.—OUR BLESSED LADY CELEBRATES THE FESTIVAL OF HER ESPOUSALS.

THE duration of the life of this happiest of men, St. Joseph, was sixty years and some days. He espoused the Blessed Mary in his thirty-third year, and he lived a little more than twenty-seven years in her society. At the death of her holy spouse, our Lady was nearly forty-one years and six months old. She felt a natural grief at his death, because she had loved him as her spouse, as a very great saint, and her protector and benefactor; and, although the well-regulated mind of our admirable Lady controlled her sorrow, it was not the less profound. The more she knew of the high degree of sanctity which her spouse had attained among the great saints, whose names are inscribed in the Book of

Life, the greater was her affection for him. And, since we cannot lose without sorrow that which we tenderly love, we cannot doubt that the grief of the Blessed Virgin was very great, when we measure it by the love she bore to the holy patriarch.

This is not the place to treat, particularly, of the excellence of the holiness of St. Joseph, for I have no order to impart, more than what will serve generally to make manifest the dignity of his spouse, to whose merits (after those of her divine Son) we must attribute the gifts and graces with which the Most High favored the glorious patriarch. And, even if our blessed Lady had not been the meritorious cause, or the instrument of the sanctity of her spouse, she was, at least, the immediate end to which that sanctity referred. The virtues and graces which the Lord communicated to His servant, Joseph, were conferred to render him more worthy of her whom He had chosen to be His Mother. It is by this rule, and by the esteem and love which this adorable Lord bore to His most pure Mother, that the sanctity of St. Joseph is to be measured. Doubtless, if there had been found in the world another man more perfect and more excellent, His Majesty would have made him the spouse of His own Mother; and, since He conferred

this dignity upon St. Joseph, it must be granted, without contradiction, that he was the greatest saint of God on earth. As he had been created for such an exalted purpose, it is certain that it was with the design to render him worthy of the august Mary, and to proportion him, by her powerful right, to these same ends. This proportion was to be found in the holiness, the virtues, the gifts and graces, natural or infused, which he so eminently possessed.

I observe a difference between this great saint, and the other saints, in the gifts of grace which they received. There have been many saints who have been gifted with privileges, all of which were not connected with their own sanctification, but had regard to other objects for the service of the Most High. They were gratuitous gifts, or apart from sanctity. But for those of our holy Patriarch, all the gifts that he received, augmented in him the virtues, and his interior sanctification. The ministry with which they were connected was a consequence of his holiness and his good works, for the more holy he was, the more worthy was he to be the spouse of the august Mary, and the depositary of the treasure and the mystery of Heaven. He ought to have been, as he was, in reality, a prodigy of holiness, and, by the special providence of God,

he was sanctified at his birth. His nature was in just proportions—his qualities excellent—his complexion perfect, and to these were superadded purity of soul and right inclinations. In him the concupiscence of the flesh found itself enchained, so that no unregulated inclinations could gain the mastery. Although he had not the use of reason at his first sanctification, in which he was justified only from original sin, his Mother was sensible of a new joy in the Holy Spirit, and, without fully penetrating the mystery, she performed great acts of virtue, and believed that her child would become great before God and man.

St. Joseph, as we have said, was born beautiful and most perfect by nature. He brought to his parents an extraordinary joy, like that at the birth of the little Baptist, although the cause of it was less manifest. The Lord advanced him in the use of reason, and gave it to him in all its perfection, in the third year of his age. He communicated to him, also, an infused science, and a new augmentation of grace and virtue. The holy child began, henceforth, to know God by faith; he knew Him also by natural reason, as the primal cause and author of all creatures, and he comprehended, with a most

sublime conception, all that was said of God and His works.

He had, at the same time, the power of elevated contemplation, and he practised the virtues admirably, in proportion to his tender years. The use of reason dates with children usually about or after their seventh year. St. Joseph, in his third year, was already, in his reasoning faculty, a perfect man, and in holiness also. He was of a sweet disposition, charitable, kind, and sincere. In all things he gave evidence of holy and angelic inclinations, and, growing in age and in perfection, he attained, by a most holy life, the age at which he espoused the most Blessed Mary.

Then to augment for him the gifts of grace, and to confirm him in these gifts, our Blessed Lady aided him by her prayers. She earnestly supplicated the Most High, that if He commanded her to enter the marriage state, He would sanctify her spouse Joseph, so that he should conform himself to her chaste desires. This august Lady knew that God would be gracious to her prayers, and that He would operate in the soul of the holy Patriarch effects divine and beyond expression. He imbued him with the perfect fulness of all the virtues and all the gifts.

His Divine Majesty perfected anew all his

faculties. In the virtue of chastity he was more elevated than the highest seraphim, because, inhabiting a body, mortal and earthly, he possessed a purity equal to theirs—they being disengaged from matter. There never even entered into his thoughts any image in the slightest degree impure, or of an animal or sensual nature. By this perfection, and by his angelic integrity, he was prepared to be the spouse of the most pure of creatures, and to live in her society. Without this privilege he could not have been capable of arriving at so great and excellent a dignity.

Equally admirable in the other virtues, especially in divine love, he was like one who finds himself at the fountain, and replenishes himself with that living water which conducts to eternal life, or as an inflammable substance near the sphere of the sacred fire, that kindles without resistance. All that can be said in the most exalted praise of this loving spouse, has been already expressed, when it was recorded that the love of God was the cause of his sickness, and the instrument of his death. The sweet pains of love surpassed those of nature, and these were less active than the first. As the objects of his love, our Lord Jesus Christ and His Mother were present, and since the saint possessed them

in a closer union than any other mortal could approach, it was inevitable that this most faithful and candid heart must exhale itself in the affections of a love so constituted.

Blessed be the author of such great wonders, and blessed be the happiest of men, St. Joseph, in whom they were all most worthily wrought! He merits that all nations should know and bless him, since the Lord has not honored any other among mortals, nor ever manifested so much love for any as for him.

In the course of this history, I have said something of the visions and revelations with which our saint was favored. It is certain that he had many more than we can relate; but we may imagine great things if we consider that he was made acquainted with the mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of His most holy Mother—that he lived so long in close association with them, that he was regarded as the Father of this Divine Saviour, and was truly the spouse of our Blessed Lady.

Besides all this, I have discovered that the Most High accorded to him, because of his great sanctity, certain privileges in favor of those who choose him for their intercessor, and who invoke him with devotion. The first is, to obtain the virtue of chastity, and to be withdrawn from the

danger of losing it; the second, to receive powerful assistance to be freed from sin and to recover the grace of God; the third, to acquire, by his means, devotion for our Blessed Lady, and dispositions to receive her favors; the fourth, to obtain a happy death and a special protection against the demons at this last hour; the fifth, to intimidate the enemies of our salvation by pronouncing the name of St. Joseph; the sixth, to obtain health of body and consolation in affliction; the seventh privilege to have, by his intercession, successors in families.

God grants all these favors, and many more to those who ask for them as they ought, in the name of St. Joseph, spouse of the Blessed Virgin; and I entreat all the faithful children of the Holy Church to have a great devotion for this great saint, and to be persuaded that they will become sensible of the favorable effects of his protection, if they will dispose themselves worthily to merit and to receive them.

Our Lord arose from the sepulchre after His passion and death, invested with beauty and glory, as the prophets had announced. Finding Himself with the saints and prophets whom He had relieved from prison, He promised to all the human race, the universal resurrection of the

dead as a consequence of His own glorious resurrection, in the same flesh and in the same body, each in his own; and, as a pledge of this promise, His Divine Majesty commanded the souls of many saints to reunite with their bodies, and be raised to an immortal life. These bodies arose, as Saint Matthew records in his Gospel, and among them were those of *St. Anne*, ST. JOSEPH, and *St. Joachim:* the others were ancient Fathers and Patriarchs.

Our Blessed Lady was careful every year on the festival of her most holy and chaste spouse St. Joseph, to celebrate the espousals, through which the Lord had given him to be her faithful companion, in order to conceal the mysteries of the Incarnation of the Word, and to execute with the highest wisdom the secrets and the works of the redemption of the human race. And as all these works of the Most High were as a deposite in the most prudent heart of Mary, and as she kept this festival as a mark of her high esteem for him, the joy and gratitude with which she celebrated his memory were ineffable.

Her most holy spouse Joseph descended at the festival all radiant with glory, accompanied by innumerable angels, who solemnized it with great joy in chanting new hymns, which were composed by our most Blessed Lady, in grati-

tude for the benefits which her spouse and herself had received from the hand of the Most High.

After having thus employed several hours, she discoursed a part of the day with her glorious spouse, on the Divine attributes and perfections; for, in the absence of the Lord, these were the occupations that best pleased His gentle Mother. A little before taking leave of the holy spouse, she entreated him to pray for her, in the presence of God, and to praise Him in her name; she also requested him to offer prayers for the Holy Church and the Apostles. She asked his benediction, and the glorious saint returned to heaven.

GLORY

TO THE DIVINE HEART OF JESUS,

TO MARY IMMACULATE,

AND

TO ST. JOSEPH.

St. Mary's Convent